

THE POOR AND THE KINGDOM:  
GOD IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	ix
I. RELIGION AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES.....	1
A. Socio-Economical, Political Crisis and Imbalances of Latin America.....	3
B. Church and Democracy.....	13
1. The Cuban Revolution.....	14
2. The ISAL Movement.....	15
a. Huampani, Peru - 1961.....	16
b. El Tabo, Chile - 1966.....	18
c. Uruguay - 1967.....	20
d. Nana, Peru - 1971.....	22
e. The Repression Against ISAL.....	23
3. Vatican II.....	26
4. Medellin, Colombia.....	30
C. Time, Space, and Hermeneutics.....	34
II. THE POOR AND OPPRESSED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT....	42
A. The Poor in the Old Testament.....	44
B. The Poor in the Prophet's Message.....	54
1. Justice and Denunciation.....	59
2. The Prophets and the Oppression of the Poor.....	67
3. Liberation of the Cult.....	71
4. The Prophets and Salvific History.....	74
C. Prophecy and Politics.....	76
III. JESUS AND HIS SOCIAL CLASS.....	82
A. God Incarnated with the Poor.....	87
B. The Announcement of the Kingdom to the Poor.....	92
1. Luke 4:16-30.....	94
2. The Nature of the Kingdom of God.....	100
C. The Temple: Politics and Economics.....	104
1. The Saducees.....	105
2. The Pharisees.....	106
3. The Zealots.....	108
4. The Incident at the Temple.....	112

D. The Cross and the Poor.....	116
IV. POVERTY, INJUSTICE AND REBELLION.....	123
A. Institutionalized Poverty.....	124
1. The System of Oppression - Capitalism..	126
2. Jesus, Productivity and Distribution...	132
B. Institutionalized Violence.....	134
1. The Manipulation of Violence by the Oppressor.....	138
2. The Rich are Violent.....	142
3. The National Security State.....	146
C. To Know God is to be Just.....	151
1. A Revolutionary Situation.....	153
2. The God who Chose Sides.....	160
V. SOLIDARITY WITH JESUS AND THE POOR.....	163
A. Walking with the Poor.....	166
B. The Presence and the Eschatology of the Kingdom.....	169
1. The Now of the Kingdom and Society.....	174
2. The Not-Yet of the Kingdom.....	181
C. Popular Religiosity and the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs).....	183
1. The Church of the Poor.....	185
2. Basic Ecclesial Communities.....	187
CONCLUSION.....	197
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	198

## ABSTRACT

This project deals with the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the poor. On this subject the Protestant churches of Latin America has had a very important role in creating a new responsibility toward the social reality in those countries.

If one wants to understand the poor in Latin America and their reality, it is necessary to start with a socio-economic and political historical review.

The social sciences are utilized in order to analyze the injustices, oppression and violence of the systems (Principalities and Powers) against the poor.

In reflecting, it can be seen the importance of the poor, the fights and struggles of the prophets in the Old Testament in favor of the rights of those that were powerless and deceived by the powerful and rich.

The poor had a central position in Jesus' message. The relevance of the cross, death and resurrection in a political world, has a message of hope and liberation for the oppressed and poor.

Once these realities has been viewed it is necessary to look at the position of the Church in relation to its theological position with respect to the poor and oppressed. How can the message of salvation and liberation be given? How can the Church and Christians receive a message of salvation from the poor?

The "now", and the "not-yet" concepts of the kingdom

are also viewed. This analysis is done under the dialect of eschatology and apocalypticism.

What impact does the poor has on the Church in Latin America? How has the Church responded to the poor in the socio-political oppression? What role have the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) and the Popular Church played within the Church and the poor?

This project is undertaken with the growing feeling that the poor are the chosen ones, that is through them, and by working with them that we can only achieve salvation; that God is in solidarity with the poor.



## INTRODUCTION

### A. Problems Addressed by Project

This project deals from the theological-praxis position looking at the problematic relationship of Kingdom of God and the poor. This will be analyzed under the political, social and economical implications in the Latin American reality.

The problematic increases when the relationship and the responsibility between church and society towards the poor is analyzed.

In looking at the reality of the church and society in the Latin American countries it is important to take a look at history from the underside (1), and the repercussion that this history places in the understanding of the Bible and what paper the poor plays in the concept of the Kingdom of God.

### B. Importance of the Problem

Poverty and misery is a historical reality in Latin America. The exploitation of the poor masses by the system and the rich alienates the people from their humanity as

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(1) Gustavo Gutierrez, as well as other Latin American theologians agree on this aspect. Gutierrez in his book The Power of the Poor in History (New York:Orbis, 1983), p.20 writes: "The history of humanity, as someone has said, has been 'written with a white hand.' History has been written from the viewpoint of the dominating sector. We have a clear example of this in the history of Latin America and Peru."

God's creation.

When the Latin American Theologians understood that God participates in history they were forced to look at the history of Latin American and to the roots of poverty that embrace most of the population. The topic of the poor is real and one of tremendous agony in the Latin American theology. There is the necessity to wrestle with the Biblical concept of the poor especially in its relationship to the justice and righteousness of God.

The Church exists in the midst of this poverty and suffering, she has to look at her relationship, theology, and mission in order to become a Church for and of the poor.

### C. Thesis

Through this project, the thesis to be presented is that the concept of the poor is a central Biblical concept, and what is more important, is the central concept in God's plans for humanity in regards to the kingdom of God.

From the Torah through the Prophets, we see God siding with the poor and the oppressed: speaking for them and listening to their cry. In Jesus' teaching and ministry the solidarity of God with the poor becomes a reality in history. The poor receives the teaching of the kingdom openly. It is to the poor that Jesus was sent to serve and minister as a forewarning of this kingdom.

It is only by the poor that we are evangelized and through them that we can only be saved, they are the holders

of the kingdom and its message (Matthew 25.).

#### D. Definition of Major Terms

1. Kingdom of God: A dynamic and concrete reality established by God, where justice and righteousness rules. God's kingdom indicates the "end of one own's will, richness, power, welfare, and other values dictated by our culture." (2)

The concept of kingdom of God also encloses the concept of hope and freedom that this kingdom is among us (now), and also as a promise in the eschatological concept (not-yet). The reign of God is the presence and awareness to realize until death and beyond it, that in God we all are sisters and brothers.

Jesus embodies this kingdom, making God's salvific power a reality in bringing down barriers and systems that creates divisions and injustice in order to feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, protect the fatherless and the widow, dress the naked, liberate the prisoner, dry the tears of the suffering (3), and to share ourselves with those who need us.

The salvation that is offered in this kingdom is not only a political salvation, but something more radical because it deals with the present historical salvation and also with the transcendental salvation.

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(2) Jacques Matthey, "Melbourne, Mission in the Eighties", in World Council of Churches, Your Kingdom Come (Geneva:WCC, 1980), p. 3.

(3) Julia Esquivel, "The Crucified Lord: A Latin American Perspective", in *ibid.*, p. 59.

On the temporal level - on the approach to the total Kingdom, the political salvation is a must, but the transcendental, or the fulfilment of that kingdom is the divine liberation in its totality. (4)

The kingdom of God is solidarity and commitment with the poor.

2. Poor: Those who lack the necessary basic things in life in order to have control and power over their destinies and lives.

Poor, are those that are those to whom "the luxury of a few becomes an insult" (5) and this situation becomes a sin against God.

3. Poverty: A condition created and sustained by forces that empoverishes people. It is a sinful condition created by the principalities and powers or the systems that control and exploits the life of the poor.

4. Eschatology: The concept that affirms an eschaton, the end, with the realization of God's promise. This end always pronounces prophetic judgement on the establish order through prophets - therefore, eschatology is prophetic. This end is marked by God's justice and the good news to those who

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(4) Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Da libertacao: O teologia das libertacoes Socio-Historicas (Petropolis:Voices, 1979), p. 77.

(5) John Eagleson and Philip Scharper (eds.) Puebla and Beyond (New York:Orbis, 1979), p.128.

identifies themselves with God's Kingdom. (6)

Eschatology announces the end of the old and presence of the new era. The old order is experience under oppression and sin. The future or the new era is where the old things will end. Between these two stages there is a joint where the God of history is also the God of the eschatology and the ruler of both. Eschatology has a positive and optimistic view of history: regardless of how terrible it is; it can change and improve, because God is in it and can intervene pouring it into an unexpected grandiose future.

5. Apocalypticism: It is a variation of prophetic eschatology in which its cosmic concepts degrades the prophetic line of the eschaton. It codifies, materializes, appears as possessor of magic, and also as a machine ready to produce rewards or punishments which has been already promised. (7)

All of these do not call for the conversion of people, but for hanging on to certain ideas and calculated moves in order to receive awards. According to apocalypticism God has revealed the end of time (apocalypsis); he has divided history in periods and has given people some clues on how to foretell the annihilation of history and the instauration of his Kingdom.

Apocalypticism views history as negative and pessimist, because even God is the maker, this history is

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(6) Antonio Rodriguez Carmona, "El reino de Dios en el pensamiento de Jesús", Estudios Bíblicos 39:3-4 (1981) 252.

(7) Ibid., p. 253.

under the power and control of the evil one and nothing good can come out of it. The bridge between history and what will come after the end does not exist.

#### E. Work Previously Done in the Field

The poor was always present in the Theology of Liberation. This theology was born of the praxis and reflection of the clergy with the people.

Between 1966 and 1968 a series of documents called Signos (Signs) appeared in which Gutierrez and other persons dealt with the "defense of the rights of the poor." (8)

Through the use of the social sciences Latin American theologians tried to find out the root of the problem of poverty and Hugo Assmann has pointed the importance of oppression and domination as the primary cause for poverty:

The historical incidence of the language of "liberation" in the Latin American Church is linked to the growing awareness of our situation as oppressed people (p. 37)

Perhaps the greatest merit of the theology of liberation is its insistence on the starting point of its reflection: the situation of "dominated [Latin] America" (p. 38)

We are beginning to realize what we are in history: not merely underdeveloped peoples in the sense of "not yet sufficient developed," but peoples "kept in a state of underdevelopment": dominated and oppressed peoples - which is a very different thing. (p. 49) (9)

Medellin and Puebla also dealt with the poor expan-

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(8) "Signos de renovacion" (Lima:Comision Episcopal de Accion Social, 1969)

(9) Hugo Assmann, Theology for a Nomad Church (New York: Orbis, 1976)

ing the concept of poor:

Poor in the first approximation are "the weak" and powerless in all respects: "economic, social and political". The new expression, one less common when talking of the poor, tries to include the "new poor": the despised, the rejected, the elderly (DC 651). (10)

Here we have a second meaning of the term poor that in an abrupt way is defined as "more profound, religious and specially Christian:; it deals with the spiritual attitude of the person that becomes open to God. This gives us a "more complete and complex concept of the poor." (DC 6530). (11)

Thomas Hanks in his book God so Loved the Third World (12) brings a new focus into the study of the poor and poverty By studying the language and its meaning he demonstrate the strong statements and arguments in favor of the poor that can be found all through the Bible and not only on the prophets.

This linguistic study as well as the one done by Elsa Tamez, Bible of the Oppressed, (13) gives a new understanding of the Kingdom of God and what the Good News to the poor means.

It is obvious that all this new understanding of poverty, oppression and the poor in respects to kingdom,

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(10) DC stands for "Documentos de Consultas a las Conferencias Episcopales". Documents prior to the Puebla Conference.

(11) Gustavo Gutierrez, La fuerza historica de los pobres (Lima:CEP, 1980) p. 201.

(12) Thomas D. Hanks, God So Loved the Third World (New York:Orbis, 1983)

(13) Elsa Tamez, Bible of the Oppressed (New York:Orbis, 1982)

justice a [mishpat] and righteousness [tsedeq] has made the concept of eschatology become central to the Theology of Liberation.

#### F. Scope and Limitations of the Project

In this project the basic concepts of Theology of Liberation will not be dealt with (14). This is not done due to the extense of the subject, and it will be difficult to deal with it in this study.

It will be impossible to deal with the rich and ample area of popular religiosity, like liturgy, religious songs and other religious manifestations (15).

A socio-economic and political analysis has to be done on Latin America for the last thirty years. Only the areas pertaining to poverty and under-development has been dealt with.

Another focus of attention has been the responsibility of the church to participate in the life of society in

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(14) There are several books dealing with that subject: Jose Miguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1977); Gustavo Gutierrez, A Liberation Theology (New York:Orbis, 1973); Segundo Galilea, Teologia de la Liberacion: Ensayo de sintesis (Bogota:Indo-American Press, 1976); and others.

(15) For more information in this area the following documents will be helpful: "La veta de la religiosidad popular en la perspectiva del pobre, (Lima:Centro Bartolome de las Casas, 1975); the three volumes, compiled by Gustavo Gutierrez and printed by Centros de Estudios y Publicaciones, Lima -Signos de Renovacion (1966-69), Signos de Liberacion (1969-73), Signos de Lucha y Esperanza (1973-78). Also the many religious musical recordings: Misa Nicaraguense, as well as all the new hymnology from Latin America.



all its areas: economy, politics, and social. Also, what implications the present social life has on the "now" kingdom of God and its relationship with the poor.

Finally, it is important to point the large influence that the movement of the Protestant churches had in the emergence and concepts latter developed into the Theology of Liberation. The ISAL (Iglesia y Sociedad de America Latina) was an important "house of clearance" for developing the relationship between the socio-sciences and theology. Latter, several Catholic theologians join ISAL. Prior to Medellin this was the only place where theologians could discuss freely the new concepts of liberation biblical ideas. (16)

#### G. Procedure for Integration

Theology cannot be done outside a historical situation. In order to reflect theologically on the poor, the relevance that this social class played and plays within the concept of justice and kingdom of God is necessary to deal with real and historical disciplines.

Besides considering and evaluating the historical

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(16) For more information on ISAL see: Jorge Lara-Braud, Social Justice and the Latin American Church (Richmond:John Knox Press, 1969); ISAL, "Introduction", America Latina: Movilizacion Popular y fe Cristiana (Montevideo:ISAL, 1979) ISAL, Sobre la vida de la Iglesia y el movimiento ecumenico en America Latina, Posicion de ISAL (Montevideo:ISAL, 1969) Orlando E.Costas, Theology of the Crossroads in Contemporary America (Amsterdam:Editions Rodopi, 1976); II Consulta Latinoamericana de ISAL, "El Tabo" Chile (Montevideo:EMECE, 1966)

reality of the poor under sociology, politics, economics, and other social sciences it is important to stop and review these sciences under the light of the Bible. This procedure gives us a realistic and valid analysis of the historical situation of poverty and the poor. Finally, all the reflection that can be done of this subject or any other biblical subject is invalid, from the Liberation Tehology point of view, unless all the understanding of the new reality is put into practice to help and serve better the needs of the poor.

For this project, original books and documents will be used and the translation will be done when possible by the author of this project. The notes, observations and experience of the Latin American trip in 1982 with the School of Theology at Claremont are also utilized. Also, personal interviews were conducted during such "deep inmersion travel study seminar."

It is the intention of the author to give preference to Latin American theologians, not only because these theologians are concerned more with the relationship kingdom - poor, but also because the author feels that there exists a large and excellent bibliography and documentation of Latin American authors and theologians to do any type of theological work or study.

#### H. Chapter Outline

The first chapter gives the historical background to

the work. In it the socio-economic and political situation with respect to poverty is discussed, as well as the cause and result of under-development.

This set the stage to see and understand the development of the Latin American concept of hermenutic. This is important in order to understand how the Kingdom of God is directly related to the poor.

The second chapter presents the concept of the poor and of poverty from the Old Testament and the relevance of the prophets when dealing with justice and righteousness. Also, it covers the validity and the duty of the prophets when the need arose and Yahweh called to speak on social, economic and political situations.

Chapter three presents the view of Jesus and the New Testament. How God incarnates himself on and in the poor and the political and economical situation that started a systematic poverty in those days.

Chapter four deals with the problematic of institutions and poverty. How these institutions manipulates the economy, governments, and the poor. The result of all of this is violence of the rich and powerful against the oppressed, is revolution justified for Christians living under oppressive and exploitative conditions? Other area is the new outlook of the church and how it has been affected, in changing its relationships with the principalities and powers and with the poor.

The last chapter covers the practical side (praxis).

As Christians we have to walk with the poor. God and Jesus showed us that to know God is to be just and to work for and towards the kingdom.

We deal with Ecclesial Basic Communities, its origins and how they have brought the church to the poor. How popular religiosity is affecting the life of the church and of the people in Latin America by making the relationships with God and neighbors a real experience.

The Conclusion is the personal reflection and a condensation of all what has been discussed.

The bibliography on Liberation Theology and on the Poor in this project is not an exhaustive one. It is presented with the hope that some new books or documents has been added to the known bibliography in this community.

## CHAPTER I

### RELIGION AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Scriptures are the testimonies of a people of faith, transmitted through different means such as poetry, drama, stories, chronicles, letters, etc,... We Christians believe that God continues revealing himself in our history, that he has good news for Latin America and the Caribbean, and we believe that the Scriptures give us the criteria to discover and discern that word.

(Elsa Tamez, "Mujer y varon llamados a la vida: un acercamiento biblico-teologico," Mimeograph copy, Managua, Nicaragua, 1983)

Christianity is the religion of the Book. It is in the Bible that we can read about God's story, and we have to go back constantly to it in order to reinterpret that story. (1)

Christianity is a way of life, and as such it is affected by the social and political environment - not only develops, but responds and reacts to these two elements. The environment of the society does not determine the Christian faith, but the faith has to be understood in this context: How God wants Christians to act under the present conditions.

Theology is not free from the past or the present, but it has to be free and open towards the future - that future that is the Kingdom of God. It is with the reading of the Bible and its interpretation (hermeneutics), with the reflection of our human condition, and with the present realities of our lives that we can interpret God's will toward his creation.

In order to understand the poor in our interpretation of the Bible properly, we must be suspicious of those interpretations based on advantage. For this reason, it is well to look to the Latin American reality of the past 40 years, but our view has to be formulated in the way that Rafael Avila suggests:

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(1) Juan L. Segundo, The Liberation of Theology (New York:Orbis, 1976), p. 7.

We are interested in trying to read the Bible from Latin America, or perhaps in trying also to read and understand our situation from the Bible. (2)

A. Socio-Economical, Political Crisis and Imbalances of Latin America

World WarII had freed somewhat the Latin American countries from British and American domination. The Latin American countries had contributed to the war efforts by aiding the United States with cheap raw materials. At the same time, the European and the United States' industry had turned into a war oriented production. This condition had forced the countries in Latin America to start providing for their internal needs, creating small national industries with an internal market and a national economy.

This new economic situation broke the old agrarian oligarchy that had ruled the Latin American countries for centuries, and brought forward a new burgeoise.

After the war, the United States emerged as the primary world power, not only militarily but also economically and ideologically. It was during the fifties, due to the economic and industrial recuperation of England, France, Japan and Germany, that the United States consolidated its

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(2) Rafael Avila, Biblia y Liberacion (Bogota:Editorial Paulinas, 1976), p. 18.

economic and political supremacy over all of Latin America. This situation created a stagnation of the national economy and the industrial programs. (3)

The stagnation grew worse as the decade of the sixties advanced. During these years the per capita growth of the National Product in Latin America decreased from 2.2% between 1950-55, to 1.5% during 1960-65, and to 0% between 1965-66. (4) The decline in the economy resulted in the marginalization of the rural population, who abandoned their ~~urban~~ <sup>rural</sup> setting forced by the structures of land ownership, and emigrated in waves to the larger cities looking for jobs (5) and the social result was the favelas, poblaciones, arrabales, barriadas or ciudades perdidas, which created slum belt areas around the larger cities. (6)

The foreign technology and the transnational corporations, aided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), forced economic bankruptcy on most of the national industries

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(3) F.E. Cardoso and E. Falleto, Dependencia y Desarrollo en America Latina (Mexico D.F.: Siglo XXI, 1970)

(4) Samuel Silva Gotay, El Pensamiento Cristiano Revolucionario en America Latina y el Caribe (San Juan, Puerto Rico: CEHILA/ CARIBE, 1983), p. 30.

(5) Sven Lindqvist, The Shadow: Latin America faces the Seventies (London: Penguin Books, 1972) Quotes from an interview in p.23 done in a slum in Lima: "There is no industry in the Sierra. There they have handicrafts and giant foreign companies - nothing in between."

(6) As an example, in the mid fifties, Lima had a population of one million and 100,000 lived in slums. By the early sixties the population had doubled and 400,000 lived in slums. In 1980, just one barriada: Villa El Salvador, had



in Latin America (7), creating a growing unemployment problem through the constant automatization of industry. The working force, in the industrial section, decreased from 27.8% in 1950 to 22.0% in 1965.

It is interesting to notice that Latin America has 8.2% of the world population, and it contributes about 5% of the total world products, and 6% of the total world trade, but its per capita income is one third lower than the world's average (except Asia and Africa). Between 1950 and 1970, the annual growth rate was only 0.6% (8)

Another project that affected Latin America in a negative way was the Alliance for Progress. This project caused the internationalization of the strategic market in

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450,000 people living in infra human conditions. The same situation is found in all the major cities of Latin America.

X (7) Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America (New York:Monthly Review Press, 1973) states: "The IMF was created to institutionalized Wall Street's financial dominion over the whole planet, when the dollar first achieved hegemony as international currency after War World II. It has never been untrue to its masters." (p. 242) As an example of the destruction of the national industry, the banks of Latin America suffered: "According to the International Banking Survey... Chase Manhattan Bank acquired the Banco Lar Brasileiro (34 branches) in 1962, the Banco Continental (42 branches, in Peru) in 1964, the Banco del Comercio (120 branches in Colombia and Panama), and the Banco Atlantida (24 branches in Honduras) in 1967, and the Banco Argentino de Comercio in 1968." (p. 244-45) Galeano also quotes from a speech to the AFL-CIO congress in Miami, as reported in the New York Times, December 8, 1961, p. 18 "President Kennedy has already admitted that in 1960, 'from the under-development world which needs capital we took \$1,300,000,000 and we sent out in capital for investment... \$200,000,000'".

(8) Celso Furtado, Economic Development of Latin America (London:Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 61.

the region. It also internationalized the culture, the economy, and the military and created a tremendous external debt favorable to the United States' banks and credit institutions.

It is paradoxical that when nationalism was emphasized, during the fifties and sixties, it was a period that ended with the predominant position and the increased wealth, as well as the strengthening of the foreign industry (9). The national industries were ~~disseminated~~ devastated by the competition of the free market.

The influx of transnational corporations and technology transfers placed the focal point of national education towards the technical aspect of it, giving a supremacy position to the foreign type of education over the national one; hence, slowing the national development, since this education is geared toward a foreign concept of development and toward foreign needs.

The internationalization of the military was done ideologically, in opposition to any ideology other than capitalism, through the School of the Americas, where 61,032 military officers of the Latin American forces were trained

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(9) Silva Gotay, p. 32.

between 1950 and 1972, (10) creating a new elite of military-technocrats.

This process began after World War II and it was established in the Continent with the Rio Pact of 1947 and with the establishment of the OEA in 1948. The teachings were put in practice during the attack on Guatemala (11), and the Dominican Republic in 1965.

In conjunction with the military training, the dogma of National Security was presented as the fundamental solution to the survivability of the Western Hemisphere (United States). The Rockefeller Report issued in 1967 gave strength to the National Security concept, and it has dominated most of the policy towards the Latin American nations. Its dangerous and imperialistic results have been seen in Chile and now are apparent in Nicaragua.

It is important to understand the conditions that Latin America faced at the start of the decade of the seventies. One of the historical conditions was the sense of economic crisis that the international order was beginning to feel. This world economic crisis is a cyclical inheritance of the capitalistic system, but this time its repercussions were global, affecting in a larger and deeper

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(10) Antonio Caballa Rojas, Estados Unidos, America Latina: Fuerzas Armadas y Defensa Nacional (Mexico D.F.: Universidad Autonoma de Sinaloa, 1980), p. 73.

(11) For more information see Richard H. Immerman, The CIA in Guatemala (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982)

way the countries of the Third World. The growth of the net earnings of the industry and transnationals had achieved a saturation point and there was no sense in new investments for the earning could not be as large as before. The cycle of accumulation had ended and if there were no accumulation, the system could not be regenerated. The problem had touched bottom.

The solution was that the capital had to be re-appraised, and the only way left for the economist, without damaging the capital of the rich nations, was to reorganize the working process: maximum the automatization of industry and the transfer of industries to nations that would offer cheaper labor. This meant the lost of million of jobs due to the new technology.

In Latin America the popular movement was the result and the response to this action taken by the rich nations in reappraising the capital. In South America, it was through the military dictators that the re-appraisal of the economy was done.

This brought the protest even of the bourgeois, who by now were feeling the economic crisis. To the military dictatorships there was only one social sector with whom a national security alliance could be made: the very rich, the ultra conservative, and their international corporations powers.

In Central America the process of modernization did not take place and a political re-vindication from the ruling

class did not release the social and political pressure. On the contrary, the domination of the rich continues.

Facing these economic imbalances, the results are the Popular Movements. The United States, in order to maintain its empire, puts its efforts into joining the ultra conservative powers in order to rebuild the system. But this time, the economic crisis has even affected the United States. The only solution left was to strengthen some of the links of the chain in order to stop these Popular Movements. The result is heavy monetary loans and/or military aid to dictators, especially to some crucial countries like Costa Rica, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru.

Also, the economic crisis has created a contradiction in the capitalist and imperialist systems, creating a confrontation without quarters in the world economic war between the United States, the European Common Market and Japan who fight for control and the market of the world raw materials. (12) This crisis has created a major concentration and centralization of wealth and the establishment of new zones of influence and control of world labor. Also, international capital is planning the world economy in order to slow down the economic crisis which is driving the revolutionary wars. (13)

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(12) Ines Garcia, "La lucha de los pueblos Latinoamericanos por la democracia", in her Para entender America Latina (Lima:Tarea, 1979), p. 77.

(13) We can see the creation of the Trilateral Commission by Rockefeller as an effort to create the planification

It is under these circumstances that the socio-political studies are trying to explain the conditions in Latin America, and from them the theory of dependency came to be. This social science discovered that historically, underdevelopment is the product of the development of capitalist nations who have been exploiting, stealing, and oppressing the countries of the Third World. (14)

These analyses are fundamental in the basic understanding of oppression for they give us a new meaning to the problem of underdevelopment, based on the understanding of the historical process of imperialism. From this new understanding, the solution to the problem springs: the liberation from foreign economic ties. This theory demonstrates a relation of exploiter-exploitee, but it fails, for it does not take in consideration the struggle of classes: the rich and the poor; therefore, its solution is more of anti-imperialistic or anti-feudal, rather than a class struggle.

The struggles of the people of Latin America are reflected in their lives and in the statistics, for they show the immensity of their oppression: 36% of the Mexican

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of the world economy through the great capitalism of the United States, Japan and the countries of Europe. For more information see Hugo Assmann (ed.) Carter y la logica del imperialismo, Vol I, II (San Jose, Costa Rica:Editorial Universitaria, 1968)

(14) Gerald Chaliand, Revolution in the Third World (Harmondsworth, England:Penguin Books, 1978), p. 12

families (22 million people), live under marginal conditions, (15) 1% of the total working population of the country earn 12% of the total National Income. This means that the income of one member of the wealthy class is greater than the income of 61 poor families. (16)

In Peru, the Consumer Price Index (the power of purchase) declined in a very dramatic way. In 1960 an index of 100 is used; by 1965 it was 153.2; in 1970, 243.3; by 1975 it had reached 440.8; and by 1980...3,422.0 (17)

Child mortality in Mexico during 1978 was 66 per one thousand and in remote areas it was as high as 227 per thousand. (18) According to the newspaper L' Humanite in 1980: "Every minute 32 children die of hunger in the world" (19). This means that 1,380,000 died every month of hunger.

Bolivia and Paraguay are the poorest countries in South America; of these two, Bolivia has the richest

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(15) Antonio Prida Barrios, Cristianismo: Compromiso Social (Mexico D.F.:Libreria Parroquial, 1982) p. XXV This figures were obtained in 1977 by Pedro A. Aspe, Una Vision panoramica sobre el Analisis de la Distribucion del Ingreso en Mexico. Edicion mimeografica del Instituto Tecnologico Autonomo de Mexico, 1981.

(16) Miguel S. Wionezek (ed.) La Sociedad mexicana: Presente y Futuro (Mexico D.F.:Fondo de la Cultura, 1974)

(17) David G. Becker, The New Bourgeoisie and the Limits of Dependency: Mining, Class and Power in "Revolutionary" Peru (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1983) p. 346.

(18) Prida Barrios, p. XXVII.

(19) Ibid., p. XXXVIII.

subsoil in the world. 80 to 100% of that wealth belongs to transnational merchants who take the earnings out of that country. While life expectancy in the United States is an average of 76 years, in Bolivia it is only 46 years. (20)

It is calculated that half of the Honduran population suffers from different kinds of mental problems due to infant chronic malnutrition. Only 4% of the population has some kind of social benefits in the case of illness.

In Colombia, called a democracy, 25% of the population lives in "extreme poverty" with an annual per family income of \$75.

In El Salvador, 0.2% of the population (the infamous 14 families), own 21% of the agrarian land.

Among the Indian population of Guatemala (60% of the country), the illiteracy rate is 90%. More than half of the population receives a salary of \$1 per day.

Haiti is the poorest country in the hemisphere. 80% of the total population suffers of chronic hunger. 170 children out of every 1,000 die before their first birthday (the highest infant mortality in the world).

In Uruguay, a country with systematic military repression since 1973, one in every 75 Uruguayans (including women and children) has been in jail and 80% have

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(20) Manuel Useros (ed.) La vida por el pueblo (Madrid: Editorial Popular, 1981), p. 14-15. All the information and statistics quoted were obtained from this source.



been tortured.

Brazil, the largest country in Latin America, has the largest foreign debt in the world. The Brazilians, since 1964 have suffered the longest systematic repression.

Argentina, where every week mothers, wives and sisters of the "desaparecidos" meet to protest and to ask for their loves ones, is also a country that has suffered military repression.

Caracas, Venezuela, the capital of Latin American oil, is a city surrounded by 80,000 chabolas (shacks) in a country where more than 1,000,000 abandoned children live.

Chile is a country whose national industry has been destroyed and their minerals have been robbed. Unemployment is rampant, and the military repression of Pinochet has tortured, killed, terrorized and caused the disappearance of thousands of Chileans.

In the mist of this suffering and oppression some Christians started waking up to reality. ISAL (the Church and Society bodies of the Protestant churches of Latin America), started working for more just societies.

Later, Vatican II and the CELAM Conference at Medellin took place, and a new look was taken towards the road for liberation.

## B. Church and Democracy

Since the time of Emperor Constantine, the Church has

tried and done its best to remain outside of the reality of the world and of the people. Politics was considered an area in which the Church could not be involved. Naturally, the Church gave its blessing to the status quo: in the beginning it was to the Emperor; later it was given to the kings, which even called on God to justify their position of power. With the development of nations and political ideas, the Church is found on the same side as the status quo, but this time it is called "democracy", and it does not matter if it is an imposed "democracy" by the few on the majority of the people - the poor.

The glance at the new road that was created by several historical events in the life of Latin America provides new tools for the interpretation of the church's roll in the world and its relation to the people, to those who suffered from the same "democracy" that the Church has been protecting for so many centuries.

### 1. The Cuban Revolution

Of all the political movements, the Cuban revolution carried the most impact in the life of Latin America.

With the experience obtained at the Sierra Maestra, and the enthusiasm created by the transformation achieved by Cuba, guerrilla movements appeared in several countries. An optimistic feeling began invading all the nations of Latin America. The workers, students and the revolutionary parties

foresaw a brighter future.

This same feeling came upon the Church. Che Guevara, from Argentina; Camilo Torres, from Colombia, and Nestor paz Zamora from Bolivia, became mystical examples of this period where the illusions of triumphs and a new way of faith married. As a result, some Christians became committed to better their societies. The result of this was the engagement of Christians in popular movements, in the best tradition of Morelos and Hidalgo.

The figure of el Che was the symbol of the New Man. As a response to a question, Ernesto Cardenal answered:

They [the Cubans] say that the best example of the "new man" is Che Guevara and they present him as the model for the Cuban children. In reality, Che Guevara was a man in which egotism was completely absent. (21)

The decade of the sixties ended with great expectations and with important movements in Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Peru, to which the Church and the younger priests and pastors looked with a new insight. It was the era of dreams.

## 2. The ISAL Movement

The importance that the ISAL (Movimiento de Iglesia y Sociedad en America Latina - Church and Society Movement in Latin America), played in the movement of the Latin American church towards the concept of liberation has not been given

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(21) Silva Gotay, p. 287.

its rightful place in the total struggle.

a) Huampaní, Perú (1961). This movement within the Protestant churches emerged from the Huampani Conference, which took place in July, 1961. Five interdenominational bodies sponsored it. The participants were Christians workers, nine theological professors, three congressman, one medical doctor, one accountant, one engineer, one dentist, one economist, one news reporter, one lawyer, one industrialist, and one businessman. (22)

These persons met looking for the reason and the real nature of social change. Other elusive questions were raised: What are the roots from which these changes operated on the social structures? Why did the church find itself involved in, and conditioned by the change - inside rather than outside the revolution as has been assumed at one time? (23)

At the same time some real and concrete answers were given:

The rapid socio-cultural changes that characterize the life in Latin America cannot be separated from the changes in the world of politics and economy... They are the result of a series of historical factors and, without any doubt, it is at the root of these problems that we can find a need of Christian principles, which nature and real projection we have to discover. All of these changes manifest themselves, especially in the transformation of the traditional structures. This

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(22) Luis E. Odell, "Historical Notes" in ISAL Encuentro y Desafío (Buenos Aires:ISAL, 1961), p. 16.

(23) Jorge Lara-Baud, Social Justice and the Latin American Church (Richmond:John Knox Press, 1969), p. 14.

irreversible process offers the church the opportunity to collaborate in such transition. The maximum exponent of this process is the translation from an agricultural economy to an industrial one. (24)

It was recognized that underdevelopment in Latin America is manifested in "lack of respect for the individual" which naturally has repercussions for the family, education, and religion. (25) The liberation of women and their "new place in society" was seen as an urgent need. (26)

The participation of the church in political life was analyzed in great length and it was recognized that when the Christian accepts the Lordship of Christ over history, then history stops having an abstract meaning and it becomes the true presence of Jesus Christ here and now, which is not conditional. (27) God is acting now; therefore, the participation of the Church is nothing other than being faithful to God's creation.

The preoccupation of ISAL with the economic aspects of life was to achieve a more just and responsible society, where every human being shall have the opportunity for a decent life and where spiritual, as well as cultural develop-

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(24) "La responsabilidad cristiana frente a los rápidos cambios socio-culturales", in ISAL Encuentro y Desafío, p. 27.

(25) Ibid., p. 28.

(26) Ibid., p. 36.

(27) "La actuación profética del cristiano en la vida política Latinoamericana", in Encuentro..., p. 40f.

ment can be possible (28). This calls for a new economic system that will have to balance liberty, justice and progress.

b) El Tabo, Chile - 1966. The Second General Conference took place in January of 1966 at El Tabo. It was here where ISAL developed more precise and clear theological concepts. The Christian community was seen as existing in an historical space where it has to discover its nature and carry on its mission. These two poles are biblical revelation and history. They rejected the Hegelian concept of history (humanly made); instead they viewed history as "the process in which God works a plan of redemption." (29) In this perspective, history becomes a way of revelation, and the Church "here and now". This will force the Christian community to interpret the political and socio-economical decisions for what they will mean, and for their effect upon institutions or social structures.

The delicate subject of religion and politics was dealt with in a very clear way:

The Christian shall participate responsibly, and creatively in the political life as well as in civic and social activities...There is no need to create "Christian political parties for those parties will bring disunity within the Church. We cannot fear to work and partici-

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(28) "La preocupación cristiana por el desarrollo y el progreso económico", Encuentro..., p. 55f.

(29) Hiber Contreris, "Crónicas", in ISAL, II Consulta Latinoamericana de ISAL, "El Tabo - Chile" (Montevideo:EMECE, 1966), p. 4.

pate with groups which have pronounced themselves as non Christians, and even anti Christians, for its is with them where our orientation, our prespective of the reality of human existence, serenity, and patience are most needed. (MK. 2:16-17) (30)

The subject of violence was also dealt with. They made a clear point that violence cannot be introduced in a society where violencia is already present: "This violencia blanca (institutional violence) is killing through hunger and sickness the Latin Americans and is depriving them of opportunities of life." (31) In this analysis it is concluded that a physical violencia that will stop the violencia blanca is a closer approximation to God's will.

It was also at El Tabo, where the subject of secularization was discussed:

There is also a theological understanding of secularization as a process arising out of the preeminence of the activity of God in biblical history, which may be described as a process of desacralizing...In the Bible, this desacralizing is intimately connected with the facts of the revelation of God, since these are diametrically opposed to understanding the action of the pagan gods of nature...It is in Jesus Christ that this work of desacralizing is fully disclosed. Born of a woman, in a manger, amid the prevailing poverty (Luke 2:1-7), he lived the life of the ordinary man: He was neither a Levite nor a scribe nor a "man of religion" according to the fashion of his day (Luke 4:20-24). When the moment arrived for him to take up his calling, he did not go off to the holy places, but fulfilled his mission in the midst of society (Mark 1:14, Luke 4:14, Matt. 4:12-17), facing all the inherent risks. He broke down the Parisaic legalism (Mark 2:23-28, Luke 13:10-17, etc.) he approached those scorned by the religious men of the

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(30) Ibid., p. 14.

(31) Ibid., p. 15.

day for their impious lives in order to include them in his group of disciples (Matt. 9:9-13). (32)

The distinction between secularization and secularism was made by denoting that the later appears when it is felt that the meaning of the process itself should be affirmed as the ultimate and definitive goal of history. In this case, going beyond its bounds, secularism becomes a new metaphysical theory that, in virtue of the impossibility of confirming its assertions, distorts the facts.

In Latin America, the process of secularization is not uniform. In some regions there exists a great degree of secularization (Mexico, Cuba - since the revolution, Uruguay and Argentina). In other countries the process is being accelerated by the fast urbanization which is rocking the continent. By this process of secularization people can be liberated from the limitations of the metaphysical world view, and at the same time take up certain new responsibilities because now he realizes that it is people who can influence the course of events in history, which is God's history.

c) Uruguay - 1967. Piriápolis, Uruguay, was the site for the Third General Conference in 1967. The theme was "The participation of Christians in the social transformation of Latin America."

One of the decisions taken by ISAL was that they

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(32) Lara-Braud, p. 74-76.



would not identify themselves with any political group or organization, but that ISAL could and would be an intermediary place from where they could help prepare Christians to transform society. (33)

In the social projects ISAL called for a total commitment to Jesus Christ in the service of Christians by offering authentic testimony as servants of Jesus, even if this will cause sacrifice. The document also dealt with the tragic economical conditions:

The economical abyss constantly grows deeper, making the rich richer and the poor poorer. (34)

Other suggestions to the Church that ISAL adopted were:

- a. The Church should begin concientizing the membership on the social responsibility and imparting knowledge about the reality of the underdevelopment conditions of the continent. (35)
- b. Any project of social service that the Churches will sponsor or support shall strive for the immediate or mediate change in the dehumanizing structures and systems. (36)
- c. The consequences of internal migrations are the result, exclusively, of socio-economics. It demonstrates the social unbalance and the non-conformity of the people with living conditions. The aspirations to improve their social status colides with the

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(33) "Estrategia y acción futura de ISAL", Carta de ISAL 1,1 (Montevideo, Uruguay. Abril 1968) 2.

(34) "Servicio y proyectos sociales", Carta..., p. 2.

(35) "Organización y desarrollo de la comunidad, Carta..., p. 2.

(36) "Servicio y...", p. 2.

prevalent social structure and this is expressed in the displacement of the population looking for better social standards and living conditions. (37)

d) Ñana, Perú - 1971. The Fourth General Conference met in July 1971. In Uruguay ISAL defined itself as a middle ground group between the revolutionary forces and the popular forces. It was between Uruguay and Nana that ISAL found out that they have not identified in reality with the popular masses, (38) and ISAL deepened their commitment in the revolutionary process through Paulo Freire's popular pedagogy, (39) as well as in urban popular mission projects.

At Ñana it was decided that the popular masses needed to be mobilized and their political concientization deepened:

We have suggested that reconciliation with God calls for our participation in his struggle. Our no-reconciliation with all those social forces: cultural, economical, political, ecclesiastical; "powers of this world" that are engaged in preserving the different forms of sin which have been transformed into institutions. (40)

The response at Ñana is radical, for it calls for a

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(37) "La tragedia de las migraciones internas", Cartas de ISAL, p. 2.

(38) ISAL, "Introduction", América Latina: Movilización Popular y fé Cristiana (Montevideo:ISAL, 1979), p. 1.

(39) Se vive como se puede: resultado de una experiencia de aplicación de pedagogía de Paulo Freire (Montevideo:Tierra Nueva, 1970)

(40) ISAL, Sobre la vida de la iglesia y el movimiento ecuménico en América Latina: una posición de ISAL (Montevideo:ISAL, 1969), p. 8.

change of "militant insertion in the political struggle."

(41) It is here where ISAL finally became a movement totally in solidarity with the popular movement of Latin America.

The struggle of classes was admitted and ISAL saw its mission as stimulating the cause of the popular mobilization. (42)

This was going to be accomplished by promoting and politicizing popular education; denouncing, pressuring, and conscientizing the people from the churches by turning them into a place for popular theological reflection which was going to be "incarnated in the Continental reality and its revolutionary process"; and by committing themselves to concrete actions and criticism of the dominant ideology; serving as a coordinator for the different popular movements. (43)

e) The Repression Against ISAL. The early seventies brought more repressive dictatorial governments in Latin American than at any other period in its history.

Looking back to those years we see the short-lived popular government of General Torres which had been overthrown in Bolivia by Banzer. In Chile, the Pinochet-CIA conspiracy ended with democracy and with the Unidad Popular, killing president Allende. This criminal coup caused a

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(41) Movilización popular y fé Cristiana., 162.

(42) Orlando E. Costas, Theology of the Crossroads in Contemporary Latin America (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1976), p. 201.

(43) Movilización..., p. 171-172.

terrible setback to ISAL, which had to look for another country for its headquarters. The repression in Argentina against all popular movements increased in "quality and quantity"; the same can be said about the Uruguay, where the government banned ISAL, confiscated its publishing house, and sent its personnel into exile. (44) Brazil had been a very repressive government for several years.

This repression caused the disintegration of ISAL. During the first months of 1974, all the General Staff had been scattered all over the continent.

By 1975 Latin America was worse off politically socially and economically than in 1961. Military governments with brutal and systematic repressive apparatus were massacring the continent. All the hopes and plans since Huampani in 1961 have been destroyed by the military boot, and the bayonet.

Orlando E. Costas quotes Hugo Assmann from an interview in regards to where the ISAL failed:

At Nana there was an erroneous analysis of ISAL; the latter was seen as a mass movement, which it is not. As it has turned out, ISAL is "a schizophrenic organization" which at best has served as "a Central Project Agency of useful service and an ideological front." Therefore, says Assmann, "ISAL ought not to magnify its grass-roots work. Rather the significance of ISAL should be reduced to its real studies. (45)

Another weakness of ISAL was in regard to its theology-praxis; it lacked a pastoral quality, and when they

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(44) Costas, p. 210-211.

(45) Ibid., p. 21-25.

realized the need of a pastoral link with the official church it was too late. That is why while Christians of ISAL engaged in the struggle for liberation, the relations and support systems between this group and the popular movements was almost none existent, and ISAL was often rejected by the local churches.

It is interesting to notice that the Theology of Liberation took good notice of such a failure, and we find Gutierrez struggling for a theology that comes out from a praxis of the poor, from where the popular moves originates:

Only by taking root in the marginalized and exploited classes, and only by emerging out of them, from their aspirations their interests, their struggles, and their cultural categories, will [such Christian groups] be forged into a new People of God, that will make the gospel message heard by all men and women and be a sign of the liberation of the Lord of history. (46)

Out of the Nana experience, a new understanding of the faith started emerging; one that has to maintain independent position against "simplistic political processes that fail to take account of all the dimensions of man." (47)

After years of travelling through rough roads, ISAL met for the last time in March of 1975, at San José, Costa Rica. It was here that the General Conference sought to understand the meaning of the Gospel in the concrete and complex reality of Latin America. It became clear that a new

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(46) Gustavo Gutierrez, "Praxis de liberación y fé cristiana" in Signos de liberación: testimonio de la iglesia en América Latina: 1969-1973 (Lima:CEP, 1973), p. 135.

(47) Ibid.

church could be possible only and only as the Gospel is announced from a position of identification and solidarity with the people oppressed by poverty.

Also, at San José, ISAL began to dissolve itself in order to bring a decisive presence in the pastoral activities of the church. (48)

ISAL ceased, but its work was not invain. Vatican II, Medellin, and the Theology of Liberation continued with the work and struggled for the chosen by God.

### 3. Vatican II

In 1960, Pope John XXIII called for Vatican Council II. In announcing his decision he stated that he wanted to open up the windows of the Church to let in fresh air from the outside world. (49) It was the hope that this would permit an *aggiornamento* of the church, the opportunity to catch up with the immense social changes of the times.

It has to be admitted that even though it was an Ecumenical Council, in other words universal, it was more of a European Council. At the end of it a lot of pressure was put on the Council by the Asians, Africans, and by the Latin Americans. "Some one defined this Council as the 'Theology

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(48) Costas, p. 223

(49) Joseph Gremillion (Ed.) The Gospel of Peace and Justice (New York:Orbis, 1976), p. 1

of the ECM (European Common Market)" (50) In reality, a lot of points that were reviewed were of concern to the European church, for the rest of the world was look as the area that was a product of their mission. The missionaries besides evangelizing, for centuries the european church has had the unconcious job of romanize the new communities; therefore, the Roman church always saw herself as a global church. For this reason it was more of a European Council.

But, new roads were opened, new windows were built through which a real *aggiornamento* was made possible: The new role of dialogue between Church and Society, and a new vision for a more responsible Church.

Many documents came out of the Concilium, but only some will be recalled. (51)

In May 1961, the Church put out *Mater et Magistra*. Pope John XXIII made clear that at the very beginning it was without any doubt that "the lofty dignity of this life" should be respected (MM1), (52) and eventhough the church's primary obligation is to care for the spiritual life and the souls of people, she is also concerned that the people should have what is required for their daily lives, "not only food and sustenance, but also comfort and advancement in various

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(50) Anastasio Gallego, "Iglesia, pueblo, poder" in *ISAL Cristianismo y sociedad* (Santo Domingo:Tierra Nueva, 1982), p. 7.

(51) All the information on the Vatican II documents has been obtained from Gremillion...

(52) This indicates section of the Vatican documents.

kinds of goods and in varying circumstances of time." (MM3)

This was an obvious statement in defense of those who lack all "the lofty dignity of this life", or the poor, the oppressed.

Pope John was not naive of the world situation and he called for justice and equality in MM69, where he stated that wealth is accumulated by violating the laws of justice and equality. He was well aware of the unfair system of capitalism since Adam Smith's "iron law of wages" (Keep the workers hungry to keep them working), and in this section of justice and equality the Concilium also dealt with the subject of wages (M71). The topic of the dignity of persons and the distribution of wealth is also analyzed in great detail.

December of 1965 brought *Gadium et Spes*; in it Pope Paul calls the attention to the immense wealth at this time on earth and to the "huge proportion of the world's citizens tormented by hunger and poverty." (GS4) Four years since *Mater et Magistra* saw the gap between the rich and poor become wider, and the economical enslavement or dependency of nations from the wealthy ones (GS9) became larger.

It is in the section on Socio-Economic Life, that great analysis was done by the Concilium. It did an historical analysis of its responsibility for dealing with the social inequalities. It states how production should be done to the service of people, "so that God's plan for mankind can be realized" (GS64) It points out that growth



cannot be allowed to be only on the economical activities of individuals. The same concern was expressed with the basic rights of individuals and groups.

In dealing with Ownership and Property, the Concilium recognized the right to have private control over material goods, but at the same time it also recognized that there are landowners with great extensions of land which are only "moderately cultivated or lie completely idle for the sake of profit." Therefore, under these circumstances it is permissible to expropriate, upon compensation such lands.

(GS71)

Populorum Progressio appeared in March 1967, and here the progress of the people is expressed. Development is isolated from the narrow and perversive field of economics and it is stated that in order for development to be authentic it must be completed by promoting the good of the whole and every person without separating the economic from the human. (PP14)

In dealing with the responsibility towards the poor, Paul stated by quoting Saint Ambrose:

You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich. (53)

By this it is stated that private property does not give exclusive use to what is not needed, when there are

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(53) Gremillion, p. 394.

others who lack the necessities. Therefore, here again the right to expropriate private property for the benefit of the poor is stated. (PP 23-24)

The bases had been established. It seems a logical and continuous trend initiated by the preliminary ISAL meetings in the late 50s. The intention is not to establish the dependency of Vatican II on ISAL. What was going to happen in Medellin was the most logical consequence, taking the historical reality which all of Latin America was experiencing. In other words, the response of Christians striving for a better life as God gives it.

#### 4. Medellin, Colombia

The Vatican Council II opened the way for the Council of Bishops at regional levels. To the lay theologians it paved the way for their free work, given them the freedom from the authority of the Bishops. "All the thinking, reflection, and voting (in the best democratic way) in the Council (even the Holy Trinity was elected by vote), had to be applied to Latin America; it had to be 'tropicalized'. (54)

Under the light of the main documents of Vatican II, theologians and the Bishops of Latin America wrote the

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(54) ISAL, Cristianismo y sociedad, p. 8

Medellin Documents. (55)

In it they are clear in avoiding the dualism between "temporal tasks and the work of sanctification" (MD5), for it is in Jesus, God's son, who was sent to the world to "liberate all men from the slavery". The document makes sure to delineate that slavery consists of sin that subjects them: "hunger, misery, oppression and ignorance. In other words, that injustice and hate, which have their origin in human selfishness". (MD3) This liberation demands a profound conversion for it implies the Kingdom of Justice, love and Peace. By this they do not want to confuse temporal progress and the Kingdom of God, even though the "better ordering of human society, is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God."

In the area of Pastoral Planning, the Medellin Conference sees a mission in encouraging and educating the conscience of the believers so that they will perceive their responsibility, within their faith, towards society (MD6). The encouragement to form national communities (later to become Basic Communities) was also expressed at Medellin.

The Latin American Bishops rejected the two main economic-political systems of the world. In Capitalism, as well as in Marxism they do not see a just solution for the Latin American problems for both systems work "against the dignity of the human person" (MD 10).

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(55) Gremillion, p. 445-463.

Being aware of the urban workers' condition, as well as the situation of the rural workers, the document deals in a very positive way with unions as well as with the urgency for the reform of agrarian structures and policies. Here we have to become very aware that the document does not only speak of agrarian reform, and the re-distribution of land, but also for technical and economic assistance. The organization of peasants into cooperatives in order for them to achieve effective structures is also expressed (MD 14). Here the reality of Latin America was expressed in a skillful way for agrarian reforms have been tried more than a dozen times and are still used by dictatorships to pacify the population. What is needed is a true reform of the agrarian structures and policies which will serve and protect the poor.

In order to make these points a reality, Medellin saw the necessity to "concientizar" socially the people by means of dialogue and by lifting up the customs and traditions in all strata of society.

In the section on Peace, the Marxist analysis becomes clear, for in this section they dealt with the tension between classes. The frustrations created by the different forms of marginality are seen as the main block that stops the legitimate aspirations of the ignored and poor sectors of society.

No peace can be achieved in Latin America while the oppression by dominant groups and sectors tries to maintain

an insensitive situation for the majority which favors the permanence of their privileges. As a result of this some members of the privileged class use violence to repress any opposition. The ideological justification that is utilized is that they are fighting communism which for them is intolerable "as the oppressed sectors become increasingly aware of the situation". (MD 5,6,7)

Medellin denounces the violence, especially institutionalized violence (MD 15,16), and the pastors of the church are given certain duties:

To awaken a living awareness of justice, infusing in them a dynamic sense of responsibility and solidarity. (MD 21)

To defend the right of the poor and the oppressed according to the Gospel commandments, urging our governments and upper classes to eliminate anything which might destroy social peace: injustice, inertia, venality, insensibility. (MD 22)

To favor integration, energetically denouncing the abuses and unjust consequences of the excessive inequalities between poor and rich, weak and powerful. (MD 23)

With this new document a new attitude was developed in Latin America. The "Roma locuta, causa finita: Rome has spoken, the case is finished" was reversed to "Roma lo a dicho y caminando haremos el camino: Rome has spoken, and walking we will make the path". Medellín, Colombia was one of the turning points, that even after fifteen years continues influencing and changing in the most profound ways the life of the churches in Latin America and in the world.

Out of all this a new way of theologizing came about: OBSERVE-JUDGE-ACT. The Latin American church was forced to look around, outside, and down in order to look at the

people, how they lived, what was happening in the world: shacks, palaces and cathedrals. It was as the church did OBSERVE that it rediscovered the poor and their suffering. The reality could not be detained and the Bishops had to JUDGE what they have seen with the assistance of the social sciences. Once they do JUDGE, they have to ACT.

One of the results of the ACTIONS was the formation of the Ecclesial Basic Communities (CBEs) and through them a new way of theologizing, worshipping, and pastoral responsibility emerged.

A serious reflection on the Bible began and the groups doing the reflecting became institutions in themselves: Onis, Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo, Golconda, Christians for Socialism, etc. The new theology was not recognized as such by the First World; it was poor, no big libraries like the seminaries of Europe, and it had strange terminology: poor, socio-economics, politics, concientization, marginalization, liberation, etc., but the new theology had other ends: to help Christians walk on new paths with a theology of the poor and for the poor.

### C. Time, Space, and Hermeneutics

The analysis of the reality of Latin America has been presented. It was in the context of this reality, in which a new approach to the Bible was needed, and a new interpretation of life, and religion was demanded.

Theology was being done in another way; this was being accomplished by rereading and rereading the present reality and the Bible. It has been said that the new theology was more a "theology of mimeograph" or the product of theological encounters, meetings, cursillos, etc. where the reflection was done by the poor and religious people dressed in blue-jeans. (56)

The Bible is an immense reservoir of different meanings, but all these meanings are equal to the reality, or the experience in the life of the people. These experiences and realities are part of God's manifestation - a starting point for deep hermeneutical activity. Theology cannot be made in ivory towers or in churches; it is an activity in which two elements are basic: God's will and people who want to walk in humbleness with God.

Juan Luis Segundo has the best description of the new hermeneutics. (57) Synthesizing his method, it can be said that

- 1) It begins from a real situation which leads us into an ideological suspicion - the why question, which is the point of observation of the reality.
- 2) The application of this ideological suspicion to our

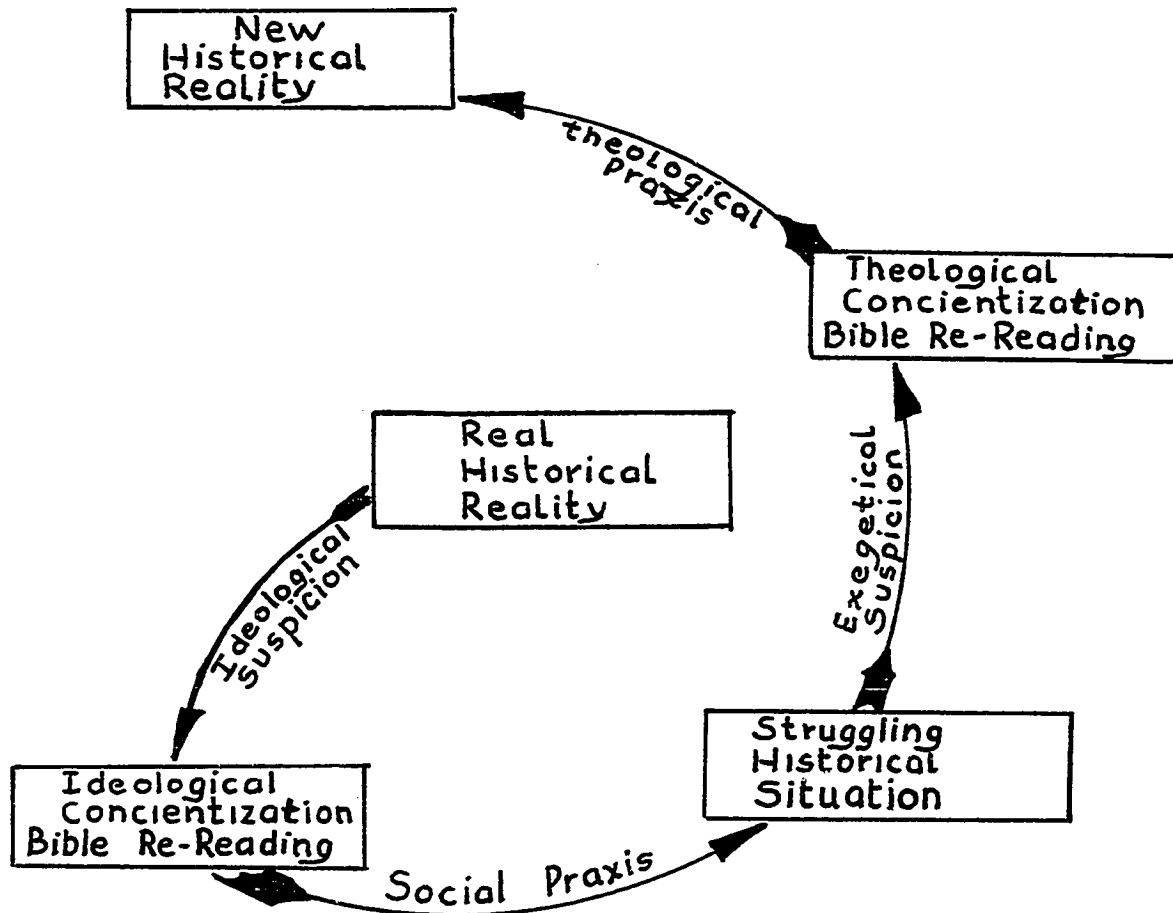
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(56) Ibid., p. 9.

(57) This hermeneutical circle was developed from Heidegger and Bultman, but amplified in its meaning by Segundo, especially in relation to "praxis". In other words, history interrupted the theoretical hermeneutical circle: which, by the way I prefer to call it a hermeneutical spiral, one that does not return to its origin, but rather it betters humanity and allows people to understand God's will by becoming more open to God's word.

historical reality. This calls for ideological concientization through the rereading of the Bible.

- 3) This rereading of the Bible demands from Christians a commitment to better this world, hence the society in which we live. Therefore, we have to struggle with the historical situation in which we find ourselves.
- 4) Christians cannot struggle for the sake of their personal convenience and the analysis of the situation will present us with an exegetical suspicion. In the rereading of the Bible we become aware of a new theological concientization that will drive us to a theological praxis, that first calls for a new hermeneutics in order to reinterpret the source of our faith by using the new elements to our disposal.





These actions lead us not to the starting point, but to a new historical reality, which continues on this spiral revolution calling for a new ideological suspicion.

By revealing our hermeneutical spiral we have to say that Hugo Assmann is clear when he states: "Theology follows practice and forms part of it as a 'critical reflection on action'." (58)

In order to understand and analyze the real situation, the social sciences have to be used. Through them we can actualize its condition of "the image of God" as creator. In other words, what the Bible tells concerning the salvific act already includes a prehuman analysis, for God is a total creator. (59) From our personal situation or reality we can choose many passages from the Bible, but the option is on the interpretation; therefore, we can find that those who exploit the "other" can find justification by ignoring passages that are not to their personal interests. In this way the word of God has been changed from liberation to an ideology.

How then can we deal with a hermeneutic for the poor? What does the Bible tell us, not only as a study subject, but as those who in their struggle demand the presence of salvation?

It has to be understood that the Bible speaks to us

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(58) Hugo Assmann, Theology for a Nomad Church (New York:Orbis, 1979), p. 57.

(59) Ibid., p. 59.

about the poor from a time and space situation. One of the defects of the old theology was that it deals from idealism and was unable to comprehend the historical reality. In many cases it "idealized reality" (60) ignoring the primordial aspect of society or the political relationship, which is natural in people and society.

The Bible was written for specific communities with specific needs. It was not written by cosmic "spirits"; neither was it written by theologians. It was put in context by the people, the common people which were immersed in their historical reality in which they saw the presence of God.

There are concordances between a present situation and a Biblical reality, but we cannot stop there, the answer has to be found. According to the Bible, faith is not the affirmation "not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21a), or the memorization of a religious truth. Rather, it is a commitment to accept God's will, his love and acts as God's agent in his world "but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21b)

The theology that privatized and spiritualized converting the Jewish tradition into a Hellenistic view of God, was the theology of circular history.

This platonic concept is being rejected by a com-

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(60) J. Severino Croatto, "Liberar a los pobres: Aproximación hermenéutica" in his Los pobres (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1978), p. 21.

munitarian interpretation, one that implies an open future. Even the Hegelian idealism, which indicates that the development of history is the manifestation of the absolute Spirit is being destroyed.

Pedro Negre indicates that the new hermeneutic that reads the Bible with a "historical sense" and a view of an "open and real future", the meaning of God, Christ, and life takes a new meaning. (61) God does not stop communications with His creation with the last book of the Bible. He continues speaking and denouncing us through the suffering and the oppression of the poor, and through all of those who have a compromise with faith, hope, and justice. This communication has taken a new mode: historical events.

The Biblical events cannot be read as simple past history, they have to be considered hermeneutically, meaning that the interpretation has to be done under the effects of the different situations in which it has been revealed. The Exodus account is an example, for the Jewish slaves in Egypt and for their descendants this event had an ontological meaning, especially in their present reality, and when the story stops having that meaning, due to the infidelity of the people, the same story recovers its subversive message.

Returning to a hermeneutics of the poor, Jimenez tells us:

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(61) Pedro Negre, La Biblia y liberación (Montevideo: Cristianismo y Sociedad, 24-25 (1970), 69-80.

If we theologize too hastily, shall we not simply find in the world of the poor an echo of the dominant ideology imposed on them by the powerful, so as to keep them impassive and resigned? If we reverently approach the poor, to listen to the voice of God, shall we not be mystifying a harsh and cruel reality, preventing it from reaching us with its primal outcry? Shall we not be bringing from outside a God of academia or poetry, not discovering the God already there, a more internal, more living, more biblical, and nearer God? (62)

When the Gospel is reached and interpreted by the poor and the oppressed, the true God becomes real and comes closer; therefore, if we take the poor seriously we become horizontal and that means that we start taking God more seriously, because it is in the horizontality that our faith and our future becomes more sensible and more open to the God of history. It is only then that an historical account becomes memory and subversive bringing a nearest God. And, it is only in this way in which a Christian can understand Jesus' ministry whose being fed vertically by God, he reached for us horizontally, turning the cross into a new hermeneutics of salvation and liberation.

In the Bible we find only one God, the God of the poor. This God is no neutral. It is not a "God of carnavadas" (63); neither is it a pure metaphysical essence. Such a god is an abstraction.

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(62) Javier Jimenez Limón "Meditation on the God of the Poor" in Richard, Pablo (ed.) The Idols of Death and the God of Live: A Theology (New York:Orbis, 1983), p. 15.

(63) "Santo" in Carlos Mejía Godoy, Misa Campesina Nicaraguense (Mexico D.F.:CBS) "Carnavadas" means looking for alibies or to a justification of actions.

The true God of Christians who are not poor is the God of the poor. All believers, regardless of their socio-economic origin, receive the mandate and the gift to opt for the poor. (64)

A new God is not being discovered here, since God has been liberated from "Cathedrals with marble floors, where he was kept captive for so long" and brought to "shacks of cardboards and dirt floors" (65), God appears new as a God of the wretch of the earth.

The new hermeneutic demands a historical participation here and now, where the actions of faith, the mutual need for a spiritual guidance, and a social action is God turned into flesh.

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(64) Richard, p. 152.

(65) Eduardo Martinez, "Cristo al servicio de quien?" in Es mi viejo (Caracas:Taurus)

## C H A P T E R   I I

### THE POOR AND OPPRESSED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Todo esta en silencio; pero es un mutismo  
hostil. Y si queremos orar, nuestra ora-  
cion es sin dialogo; es el alarido del  
viento en una casa en ruinas.

Pero Dios escucha nuestra angustia, aunque  
parezca estar lejos...

(Luis Espinal, "Silencio de Dios", Oracio-  
nes a Quemarropa (Lima:CEP, 1982), p. 42.

With the new hermeneutic tools, how can the poor be seen and how shall poverty be reread in the Bible? But more important, what is God telling us about the poor and the oppressed to us today?

In the Old Testament we see this concern from the very beginning and how the unjustified possession of wealth always created sin.

Then God said, "Let us make 'adam [people] in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth"...and God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply"

And so, we read in Genesis 1:26-28a, (1) that God created people in his image, people that would realize themselves, participate, and share in God's creation. Then in the same book, we find that Eve and Adam sinned, not because they disobeyed God - that was the result of their sin, but because they wanted to be like God (Gen. 3:5,22), not knowing their capabilities and trying to usurp God's place.

After the first people had to leave the Garden, due to their transgression, they had two sons: Cain and Abel. Cain was a farmer and Abel was a keeper of sheep. By nature farmers do not plant only for their subsistence, but usually have more than what they need; also farming means permanent settlements while cattle keepers move through the land looking for greener pastures, for better lands. These

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(1) All biblical quotation are from RSV unless indicated otherwise.

lands are also sought by the farmers and it is desirable, for farming, to protect "their" land, so stray animals will not enter "their" property. Farmers advocated "ownership of land", in other words: the denial to other people of the use of that land which they settle. Here we see the beginning of hoarding material possessions. Eventually possession of land meant larger crops which in turn determines wealth and richness. Cattle keepers by the needs of the profession in the Middle East, were nomads, constant sojourners.

From a simple analysis on Cain and Abel, we begin to see a disparity of wealth through personal accumulation of property.

The poor have been living in this world for thousands of centuries. The problem of poverty is not new, neither is the question of the rich and their wealth. What is new is the increasing amount of poverty and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, not only in the so called "Third World" countries, but also in the "developed nations".

#### A. The Poor in the Old Testament

Poverty has been given a simplistic meaning in our society. In order to understand the word, we will have to retrace it, not so much in its linguistic characteristics, but in its theological implications.

In our day and society, the term poverty indicates the lack of comfortable subsistence or lacking in abundance



of goods; it is in these terms that society accepts and interprets poverty. The poor are blamed and degraded because of their own poverty. (2) This degradation is based on the presuppositions they have inherited from society: who tend to look at the poor as outcasts, outsiders who do not belong to the privileged community in any respect.

Under these circumstances, the poor have learned to avoid hoping for a future that they are unable to realize due to a system that is oppressive and controlled by the rich and powerful.

For wicked men are found among my people; they lurk like fowlers lying in wait. They set a trap; they catch men, like a basket full of birds, their houses are full of treachery; therefore they have become great and rich. They have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deed in wickedness; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper and they do not defend the rights of the needy. (Jer. 5:26-28)

How can the poor hope for a bright future for themselves or for their children? They know that it is futile to concentrate their energies on education. They have to live and eat now; they cannot afford the luxury of buying pencils, books, pads.

The poor have stopped thinking about their suffering, for their cries turn their living reality into a cry of pain. They live day by day accepting the meager conditions that deny their hopes. This is essential to their survival in order to remain sane.

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(2) Gustavo Gutierrez, Teología de la liberación (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1980), p. 365-67.

Other ways in which we tend to look at the poor are as indecent and indolent; but in the Bible, we find parables told by Jesus in which he taught against the beliefs that the poor are lazy, indifferent, and so forth. (3)

In our Christian world we also have a different type of poverty: spiritual poverty, something that even though it rejects all type of material poverty, is considered something positive. Here we will find that the Christian concepts are in contradiction with the great aspiration of humanity, which consist of achieving freedom and eliminating the exploitation of people by people. (4)

What makes Christianity unique is its central person—Jesus. The center of his ministry was his bipolar teaching: The coming of the kingdom and the radical character of God's calling for repentance and entering into a dynamic relationship with Him. It is this teaching and the dynamic relationship that constitutes our understanding of the poor.

All through the Gospel, we find Jesus teaching about the kingdom, but for all his repeated mention of the kingdom of God, Jesus never stops to define it; and nobody asks him about the meaning of such a kingdom. Jesus used these words as if they were understood by his hearers. (5) Such a king-

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(3) Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 124-25.

(4) Gutierrez, p. 366.

(5) John Bright, The Kingdom of God (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p. 17.

dom was not foreign to the Jews, it was part of their faith and it was something they understood and waited for desperately through the centuries.

Outside the New Testament we will not find this term in the Bible; even though, in the Old Testament, the Kingdom of God is implied. It is here where we find the interesting teaching from Jesus: Kingdom and dynamic relationship with God while the Old Testament called only for repentance.

Jesus insisted in marching towards the Kingdom by preparing the way, assuming the transforming efforts of history that the same Kingdom propels, promises and expects. From one side there is the future, and from the other, the presence of the Kingdom. (6)

The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom where justice and righteousness are requirement before entering it.

Since this is the only way to know God:

I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know God.

(Hosea 2:19-20)

This Kingdom implies judgement and modification of our attitudes toward reality. In Psalms 76:9 we find judgement towards the poor and the sovereignty of God:

When God arose to establish judgement to save all the oppressed (7) of the earth. Selah

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(6) Hugo Echegaray, La practica de Jesus (Lima:CEP, 1981), p. 168.

(7) The Hebrew word used is 'Anew. The meaning is poor and weak, oppressed by the rich and powerful.

This is the announcement of the kingdom of God; it calls for a universal action of God's dynamic manifestation in favor of the poor and the oppressed by the rich and powerful. (8)

Poverty in the Bible is a sin, a shameful situation that destroys human dignity, not only the dignity of the oppressed, but also the oppressor finds that the wealth and richness keeps using and controls the person, not only in actions but the person's entire life. Therefore, poverty and the act of imposing poverty is against God's design.

It is important to look into the terminology used in the Bible and its translation with regards to the poor and oppressed. It is clear and obvious that the present translations have softened (for the benefit and tranquility of the rich) the strong language utilized by the Old Testament for the maltreatment of the poor.

Let us summarize the most common words used in Hebrew to address the poor and their suffering in the Bible:

`Ani (9) It appears 74 times. It is used for poor, weak, afflicted. The root word is `Anah which means to be

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(8) Echegaray, p. 170.

(9) Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs (BDB), A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) p. 776. For its use see Ex. 22:24; Lv. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 15:11; 24:12,14,14, +51t; 2 Sam. 22:28; Ps. 9:13; 10:2,9; 12:6; 14:6; 22:25; 18:28; 25:16; 35:10; 37:14; 40:18; 68:11; 69:30; 72:2,4,12; 74:19; 82:3; 88:16; 140:13; Eccles. 6:8; Prov. 3:34; 14:21; 22:22; 31:19; 20; 30:14; Is. 3:14,15+6t; 10:2; 14:32; 26:6; 32:7; 49:13; 51:21; 54:11; 58:7; 66:2; Jer. 22:16; Amos 8:4; Hab. 3:14; Zeph. 3:12; Zech. 7:10; 9:9

bowed, afflicted, humble. The same root in Assyrian means frustated, to do violence to. In Arabic the meaning is to be lowly, submissive.

`Anaw (10) It is used 20 times. It has the same root as the word `Ani. The meaning is poor, afflicted, humble, meak, needy, oppressed by the rich and powerful.

`Ebyon (11) It is used 61 times. In want, needy, poor (in material things), oppression, and abuse.

Dal (12) It appears 48 times. Weak, poor, thin, helpless.

Rash (13) It appears 21 times. Its root is the word Rush and the meaning is poor, be in want.

It is interesting to notice the picture type description that the Old Testament utilizes to depict the poor. Dal

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(10) BDB, p. 776. See Num. 12:3; Ps. 9:13,19; 10:12,17; 22:27; 25:9; 34:3; 37:11; 69:33; 76:10; 147:6; 149:4; Prov. 3:34; 14:21; 16:19; Is. 11:4; 29:19+11t; 32:7; 61:1; Amos 2:7; 8:4; Zeph. 2:3.

(11) BDB, p. 2 Also see Ex. 23:6,11; Deut. 15:4,7,9,11+40t; 24:14; 1 Sam. 2:8; Esther 9:22; Jo. 5:15; 24:4,14; 29:16; 30:25; 31:19; Ps. 9:19; 12:6; 35:10; 37:14; 40:18; 49:3; 69:34; 70:6; 72:12; 74:21; 82:4; 86:1; 109:16,22,31; 112:9; 113:7; 132:15; 197:41; Prov. 14:31; 30:41; 31:9,20; Is. 14:30; 25:4; 29:19; 32:7; Jer. 2:34; 5:28; 20:13; 22:16; Ezeck. 16:49; 18:22; 22:29; Amos 2:6; 4:1+14t; 5:12; 8:4.

(12) BDB, p. 195. See Ex. 23:3+17t; 30:15; Lev. 14:21+8t; Ruth 3:10; 1 Sam. 2:8; Ps. 20:10,19; 31:16; 34:19,28; 72:13; 82:3,4; 113:7; Prov. 10:15; 14:31; 19:4,17; 21:13; 22:9,16,22; 28:3,8,11,15; 29:7,14; Job 5:16; 20:10,19; 31:16; Is. 10:2; 11:4; 14:30; 25:4; 26:6; Amos 2:7+17t; 4:1; 8:6; Zeph. 3:12.

(13) BDB, p. 930. Also see 1 Sam. 18:23; 2 Sam. 12:1,3,4; Ps. 82:3+12t; Prov. 6:11; 10:4, 15; 13:7,8,18,23; 28:3, 19; 31:7; 24:34; 30:8; Jer. 5:17; Mal. 1:4.

is the person who is weak, thin (unnourished); 'Ani the person who is bowed due to a heavy load imposed by those who do violence to them; 'Anaw, the one who has the same oppression as the previous one, but who has been given a more religious connotation: the humble before God. 'Ebyon, the poor in want and in need, those who expect to receive something from the other, those who beg.

We have seen how "poor" meant to be in want, in need, to receive from someone. Naturally, as we have also seen, it denoted weakness and humility. In the religious life of Israel, this came to be interpreted also as a want, a need, a spiritual humility. So, the adjectives were used to denote a piety, or those who found themselves expecting and wanting God. Those persons became known also as poor: God's poor.

It is after the return from the Babylonian exile that this interpretation of the poor is taken in Israel, and this concept is found in Zephaniah 2:3. From then on, the poor and the humble are the faithful remnant that are in the expectancy of God (Zeph. 3:12-13).

Later we will find the Essens calling themselves the poor, the 'Ebyon of God, but this qualification is not related to material poverty. This religious group had a communal life, rejecting all possessions and individual richness, but as a monastic group they were not poor by any means. (14)

The introduction of this new concept of the poor in

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(14) Josephus, Wars II 8.3; Ant. XVIII 1.5.

the Bible raises a question of the significance of humility and poverty in the Old Testament.

Santa Ana turns to Zeph. 2:3 "For Zephaniah, humility is the source of justice; only the meek are able to wait faithfully for the signs of the saving justice of God." (15) It is the recognition of their weakness and need of help, and their faithfulness that God see fits to save them. This is manifested especially in the Psalms, where we see that the poor [*`Ani*] and needy [*`Ebyon*] are saved by God (40:17); the same concept is found in Psalm 109:31, where the needy [*`Ebyon*] find a place at the right hand of God.

We have then, that through the Old Testament the interpretation of the poor varies having an effect in the religious concept. The *`Ani* and the *`Ebyon* were the persons who, as the economical poor, did not have anything. They, the humble were dependent on the justice and the righteousness of God.

The enemies of God are the proud and the rich who are the opposite of the poor. It is their proudness which does not allow them to become persons in need of God's liberation.

Also, in the Bible we find different concepts concerning the poor. In the Wisdom Literature, poverty is seen as a result of laziness (Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:4; 20:4-13; 24:30-34), as a result of idle talk (Prov. 14:23), also as a

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(15) Julio de Santa Ana, Good News to the Poor (New York:Orbis, 1979), p. 8.

consequence of worthless pursuit (Prov. 12:11; 28:19), or because of pleasure seeking (Prov. 21:17; 23:20-21) (16).

As with all Wisdom Literature of the world traditions; the Israelites reflected on observations of their own customs, traditions, and human experiences. This same approach is utilized in the Protestant ethic giving a false notion of the poor in most societies of Protestant and Calvinistic tradition.

Naturally, very few if any types of poverty can be explained by these Wisdom sayings.

In the Old Testament, poverty sometimes is also viewed as a punishment by God, such is the case in Deut. 28:15-46; in other instances, poverty is the result of not obeying God's laws, or as a manner in which the prophets spoke to evildoers (Is. 3:16-24; 5:9-10; 14:1; Ps. 109:10-12; also we have to see what Job's friends said in 5:1-7; 15:26-35; 20; 22; 27:13-23). (17)

But not all the Wisdom Literature speaks of the poor

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(16) For a more detail analysis see: Jesus Maria Llano, "Los pobres en el Antiguo Testamento" Estudios Biblicos, 39:2 (1966) 117-25.

(17) Santa Ana. p. 2 Here Santa Ana quotes F. George: "There are some valid elements in these positions: The meaning of the values of this world, and, above all, deep faith in the injustice of God. Their weakness lies in thinking of God's justice only in the narrow framework of worldly punishment, owing to ignorance of the transcendental destiny in which God assigned to his people. Pagan and biblical wisdom were able to detect the drawbacks of this solution and to see poverty as a scandal."



in such negative terms. Even these writings saw that society always tries to praise and adulate in servility the rich, and at the same time society tries to escape from the shadow of the poor. (18)

What peace can there be between hyena and dog?  
And what peace between rich man and poor? (Rash)  
Wild donkeys are the prey of desert lions  
so too, the poor (Dal) are the quarry of the rich.  
The proud man thinks humility abhorrent;  
so too, the rich abominates the poor ('Ebyon).  
When the rich man slips, there are many hands to catch  
him if he talks nonsense he is congratulated.  
The poor (Dal) man slips, and is blamed for it,  
he may talk good sense, but no room is made for him.  
The rich man speaks and everyone stops talking,  
and then they praise his discourse to the skies.  
The poor (Dal) man speaks and people say, "Who is this?"  
and if he staggers they push him down.

(Eccli. 22:18ff - Jerusalem Bible [JB])

It is clear that we can say that the rich with their actions oppressed the poor, and that society is stimulated by the system to praise the oppressor and punish the poor.

The rich are those who raise their voices in proudness and speak with harshness and liberty, but the poor has to beg and cannot raise their voice:

The poor man's (Rash) language is entreaty,  
the rich man's answer harshness. (Prov. 18:23)

The poor are insulted and maltreated by the rich and by society. The rich or society never excuse themselves, but the apologizing comes from the poor, even when they are in the right:

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(18) Llano, p. 129.

The rich man wrongs a man and puts on air.  
while the poor (Dal) man is wronged and apologizes.

(Eccli. 13:3 - J.B.)

#### B. The Poor in the Prophet's Message

Once the exodus brought the dessert sojourns in view of the promised land. Moses called the people to fulfill God's laws, so that the promise of their fathers could become a reality: blessed with abundance in a land of milk and honey, where they will eat bread without scarcity, in which they will lack nothing and where they will eat and be full (Deut. 8:9-10)

Considering the possibility that some people will not be permitted to participate in the blessing, we find in Deuteronomy:

Of course there will never cease to be poor ('Ebyon) in the land; I command you therefore: Always be openhanded with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need ('Ani) and poor ('Ebyon)." (15:11 - J.B.)

What are the conditions of life for the poor that emanate from the Old Testament? As a general consideration, it can be said that the life of poverty is of suffering. (19)

All the days of the afflicted ('Ani) are evil. (Prov. 15:15)

Based on this we find a third view of the poor in the Old Testament, and this is the prophetic vision, where

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(19) Ibid., p. 129.

poverty is understood as the result of the ambition and egotism of other people: the poor being the result of those actions (Is. 3:13-15; 5:8-10; 10:1-2; 32:7; Ezek. 18:12-13; Amos 2:6-8; 4:1; 8:4-6; Miq. 2:1-2; 6:10-12; etc.) The prophetic line is the one that denounces the rich and wealthy as the maker, "keeper", and oppressor of the poor.

God has given a person the ability to take or to build what the person needs, but the accumulation of goods and property beyond the individual needs becomes the root of oppression and the separation between the individual and God, and the abyss between person and person. (20)

The Old Testament tells us how each prophet received a call and how they answered it believing that they had stood in God's presence, receiving and specific commission which was related directly to the Torah and Israel. This "call" of the prophets was done during a short period of time in Israel's history: the period of the monarchy. (21)

The prophetic call brought to Israel a new literary category, the "account of a call" (22) This "account of a

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(20) Santa Ana, p. 2. "This is the meaning of the story on Ex. 16 (see especially v. 18 which is echoed by Paul in 2Cor. 8:15) Thus the satisfaction of real need is acceptable, but the unnecessary accumulation of goods is severely judged."

(21) Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) II, 53-54 "This shows both how far outside the normal range of Israel's religious experience such calls lay and that they were not characteristic of the representative of Yahwism from the very beginning."

(22) Ibid. II, 54.

call" started during the 8th Century B.C., in a society that was formed by three different types of life: the farmers, herdsmen, and the city dwellers. The Israelites prior to the conquest of Canaan had been nomads or seminomads.

The conquest of the "promised land" was a long process in history, not always accomplished by fire and blood; but also through treaties, population infiltration, etc. Eventually, the Israelites became the dominant ethnic group in a Canaanite society, adopting their culture with their own traditions and also adopting a Canaanite language - which we now call Hebrew. (23)

With the acceptance of the monarchy, and especially with the reign of Solomon, (24) the Empire had reached its pinnacle. The urban and commercial way of life was greatly developed. This was accomplished at the heavy expense of the pastoral and agricultural communities. The Israelite society became a more rigid social structure, more autocratic and centralized.

The king became God's representative and also the people's intermediary; hence, the state became a new and

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(23) R.B.Y. Scott, The Relevance of the Prophets (New York:Macmillan, 1967), p. 18.

(24) The previous kings: Saul and David, were anointed by God. Solomon was not anointed, he inherited the kingship from his father David. By this time new people took over the destiny of Israel. These new people trained to rule, have lived in opulence and they despised and would not identify themselves with the poor.

powerful entity in the Israelite society. (25)

As in any government, the court, the royal officials, and the standing army are non-producers, and as such, they have to be maintained, (26) in this case, in part through the tributes of subjected people. Heavy taxation and slave or unpaid labor for the state was imposed on the people, draining the small wealth of the society.

The economic tensions of the cultural clash between the monarchy and the people, produced injustices among the Israelites, especially against the poor of that society.

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustices; who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages; who says, 'I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms', and cut out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermillion. Do you think that you are a king, because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well. Is not this to know me?, says the Lord. (Jer. 22:13-16)

According to Jeremiah, the persons who accumulate wealth beyond their needs and who become a detriment to other people do not know God; that person's "justice" and way of

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(25) James L. Crenshaw, Prophetic Conflict (New York: de Gruyter, 1971), p. 67. The author cites A.S. Herbert, Worship in Ancient Israel (1959), p. 41 where Herbert writes that the prophetic function was to strengthen the king, and that frequent inquiry by royalty forced the prophets to rely on artificial stimulants, false prophecy being the result.

(26) Samuel had advised the people concerning the burden of a monarchy: taxes, military conscription, bureaucracy, forced labor, slavery.

life are contrary to divine righteousness.

The kingdom that the Israelites asked for from Samuel was a social system contrary to God's design. This rebellion was a rejection against God (1 Sam. 8:7). This type of government broke the unity of the people. The new kingdom meant the split of the society and the imbalance of the redistribution of power and wealth. No longer was the relationship with God viewed in all its purity and dynamism. Now the king was looked upon as God's representative resulting in a separation between hierarchy and community and between those who controlled the new source of power and the people.

The separation from God and the new encroachment with the earthly kingdom meant the disorientation of the people from God, disorientation created by those who governed the people.

This precarious situation gave rise to a the need for prophets in order to have a different interpretation of history with a new and fresh perspective. God heard once more the cry of the oppressed and the prophets spoke to defend God's people who were dehumanized by the rulers and other powerful people.

The different interpretation of history done by these prophets put them in constant confrontation with the power structures, with the "status quo" and the powerful ruling class. This meant that almost all the prophets came from the grassroots, or at least based their identification with the

poor and oppressed, (27) as in the case of the prophet Isaiah.

The reality that prophets like Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others knew was the same reality that Gutierrez expressed: "Poverty is not caused by faith; poverty is caused by the actions of those whom the prophets condemn." (28)

R. Concatti perceives the prophets in a tri-dimension juncture (29):

- 1.- The loss of meaning of the past liberation in the Exodus episode - Recall and denunciation
- 2.- The present oppression of the poor.
- 3.- The punishment for the infidelity to God's history, aborting the salvific project.

Let us analyze briefly these three concepts.

1. Justice and Denunciation. It is well accepted that Amos initiated a new and very radical concept of a prophet. (30) In the same line we find Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, and Ezekiel. These prophets were persons who knew God in and through history. They were not theologians; instead they were divine instruments to whom a commis-

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(27) J. Severino Croatto, Exodus (New York:Orbis, 1981), p. 40.

(28) Gutierrez, p. 371.

(29) Croatto, p. 40. For an expanded view see R. Concatti, Profetismo y Política (Buenos Aires:Nuevo Mundo, 1979) p. 90-109.

(30) Scott, p. 72. J. Bright, p. 60.

sion was given by God, a God who was a subject of experience and practice, rather than a theological exercise.

These prophets were not foretellers, neither were they philosophers or moralists. They did not have a systematic or a process scheme of the world. They might be called preachers, but they were not preachers; they were God's speakers, bringing forth the tradition. They were mystics, but their mysticism forced them into action. They were radicals and their radicalism was based on the conservatism of God's laws. (31) They were envoys of the Living God. (32)

For the prophets, God is the God of salvific events: hence, the history of the people is the history of God and vice versa. The God that the descendants of Jacob knew, while as slaves in Egypt, was Yahweh, the Liberator, the God that heard the cry of the 'Ani, (oppressed by rich and powerful), his people, and ordered Moses to bring them out of bondage (Ex. 3:7-10). This salvific act from that moment on became part of the reminder (past) of what God represented to the people of Israel through the prophets. Even before them, we find this reminder as early as in the Ten Commandments.

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(31) Scott, p. 40-41.

(32) Here we have a clear relationship between prophets and law, which creates a theological problem to the effect of the canonical process, and salvation. For more information see Brevard S. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament Scripture (Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1980), p. 308.



The ordinary reader thinks of the Decalogue as simple laws or ordinances given by God. What is normally overlooked is the manner in which the Commandments are given: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Ex. 20:2). These words remind us what God has done for his people, leading this salvific action to a new relationship (present): "I am Yahweh your God." The results are nothing else but a response (present-future) (33) that God demands from the people he chose and accepted to be in covenant with him.

Based on these three concepts reminder, relationship and response, the prophets became the critics and the shouters for reformation (34) when the people separated themselves from God. This reformation had two foci: calling the people to reject the Baals, for they guided the people into an alienation of reality and into a false relationship with the cosmic forces. It also called the people to look for God's justice and to work and live in it.

In conjunction with this the prophets also denounced in implacable ways the social injustices, for it was in the reminder from God, their Liberating God, and the historical relationship that had existed, that the prophets found the

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(33) The term future is used here in the more pure eschatological sense. See von Rad II, p. 113 for a more detail definition.

(34) James A. Sanders, Torah & Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 55.

validity (35) of their calling for a response from God's people.

We have Amos accusing Israel's neighboring nations for their military aggressions (1:1-2:3). But the criticism on Israel is for their unjust social system and the oppression of the poor.

Amos focused God's denunciation against the ruling and powerful class for their extortion of the oppressed

The Lord says, 'The people of Israel have sinned again and again, and for this I will certainly punish them. They sell into slavery honest men who cannot pay their debts, poor [Ebyon] men who cannot repay even the price of a pair of sandals. They trample down the weak [Dal] and helpless and push the poor [Anaw] out of the way. (36) (Amos 2:6-7 - TEV)

The landlords and the judges were of the same social class, and they helped each other to create a machinery where the powerful perverted the "custom" of remission of just standards created for the defense of the poor and powerless. (37)

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(35) Ibid, p. 56-57. Sanders calls this the Canon within the Canon. The prophets based their authority in the early authoritative writings and oral traditions of Israel.

(36) Here we can compare the story of 2 Kings 4:1-7, where the poor widow has to sell her two sons because of the debts she accumulated.

(37) This is the Year of the Sabbath and the Year of the Jubilee, which we find in Lev. 25; 27:24; Is. 61:1-3. This year is also called the year of the Lord's favor (v.2). It is in Isaiah 58 where we find the direct correlation for Lev. 25 and Is. 61:1-3: "Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow his head like a rush, and spread sackcloth and ashes under him? will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to

Trouble for those who turn justice into wormwood,  
throwing integrity to the ground;  
who hate the man dispensing justice at the city gate  
and detest those who speak with honesty...  
...for I know that your crimes are many,  
and your sins enormous:  
persecutors of the virtuos, blackmailers,  
turning away the needy [Da] at the city gate.

(Amos 5:7ff - J.B.)

Clearly we see the reproach for the manner by which  
the rich prompted the manipulation and controlled the market  
and the price of the economy, affecting the poor.

Listen to this, you who trample on the needy ['Ebyon]  
and try to supress the poor ['Anaw] people of the  
country, you who say, "When will New Moon be over  
so that we can sell our corn,  
and Sabbath, so that we can market our wheat?"  
Then by lowering the bushel, raising the shekel,  
by swindling and tampering with the scales.

(Amos 8:4-5 - J.B.)

After analyzing all these words from Amos, under the  
light of the Canon, we have to recognize that this prophet is  
not a prophet of Justice; he did not preach justice; he  
preached God and the responsibility towards the poor, the  
powerless.

Justice is the result of God and not vice-versa.  
Through Amos we see that God is the just and righteous  
Liberating God of the poor, the God who choses the powerless  
and sides with them.

Micah came from a town named Moreshet (Micah 1:1),

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break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the  
hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you  
see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from  
your own flesh?" (v.5-7) Definetly verses 6 and 7 has to be  
the year acceptable to the Lord.

and most likely started prophesying about 721 B.C. continuing doing it for several years. His mission was at the same time of Isaiah in Jerusalem. Amos preached during the young days of Micah, and probably influenced him and it is very possible that Micah heard Isaiah while he preached in Jerusalem. (38)

Micah spoke against the oppression of the poor, mainly in the stealing and accumulation of land from the powerless (2:1-5) (39). This passage is interesting; the wealthy say: "We are utterly ruined; he changes the portion of my people; how he removes it from me! Among our captors (40) he divides our fields." (v.4).

The prophet is talking about a land reform which will favor the poor by bringing justice to what the powerful and rich plan and seizing the land they wished (v.2).

Another woe of the prophet was on the abuse and cruelty of the wealthy over the 'Anaw (3:1-3). The perversion of justice like Amos exposed; justice was used for the personal benefit of the rich and powerful by stealing

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(38) E. A. Leslie, "Micah the Prophet" in Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville:Abingdon Press, 1962), III, 369-71.

(39) Walther Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline (Richmond:John Knox Press, 1978), p. 197-98. "His closeness to Isaiah is indicated by the fact that like the latter he inveighs against the system of landed states and its injustices."

(40) The word used in Hebrew reads: "Among the rebellious." Every time the poor claim what is theirs they are called rebels or revolutionaries by the oppressor.

and oppressing the poor.

Their hands are skilled in evil:  
the official demands...  
the judge gives judgement for a bribe,  
the man in power pronounces as he pleases.

(Micah 7:3 - J.B.)

Micah's third main point concerns the public denouncing of the system in which he found the rich men "crammed with violence" and "liars". An example is the lack of social responsibility of the merchants who used fraudulent weights and the "short-weight bushel". It was the same denunciations that Amos had uttered in Israel, and now Micah was shouting them in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

It is in this book where we find "the most important passage in the prophetic literature." (41)

God is judging his people and in a court scene we read: "Arise, plead your case before the mountains". God is prosecutor and judge "O my people what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!".

Micah recites the Torah story: "For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Myriam." Pleading guilty, the nation asks whether its sins may be atoned with burnt offerings, with exaggerated amounts of oil and rams, even with the human sacrifice of the first born (v. 6-7). Micah answers that what God wants "of you but to

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(41) Ronald E. Clements, One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation (Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1976), p. 52.

do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." (v.8).

In a simple manner, the prophet is telling the people that God through the Torah story demands that they should walk humbly with God, because God walked humbly with the people before they were a proud nation - when they were the poor and oppressed slaves in Egypt. (42)

Sanders refers to this when he states:

The story is about God's odyssey. He had different people accompany him as the generations went by, but the story is really about God. So, God crossed on over the Jordan and was with Joshua and the league of families and clans that sort of liberated the Canaanite city-states. (43)

This passage from Micah demands that the people should strive for Shalom, justice, love and humbleness with God.

The monarchy created privileged classes which begot injustices and we find Isaiah denouncing those injustices done by the princes and the elders on the people: "It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor ('Ani) is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor ('Ani)?" (3:14-15).

The denunciation falls on the rulers and at the same time beneficiaries of the oppressive social system: the princes, counselors of the government, judges, creditors,

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(42) Sanders, p. 79.

(43) James A. Sanders, God has a Story Too (Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1979), p. 138.

greedy landowners; and so we see in 5:8-10 that like Micah we find the same situation, where neither life nor property was safe from the greed of the powerful. The poor are ruined by those who lead them: "O my people, your leaders mislead you and confuse the course of your paths." (Micah 5:12)

Because of their theology; Isaiah, Micah, and Amos, like most of the prophets were concerned with the injustices of the social order and the systematic oppression of the people, and the way in which they view God's historical purpose: to create a people that will act and live by his justice [mishpat] and his righteousness [sedeq].

2. The Prophets and the Oppression of the Poor. The second dimension, the present oppression of the poor, is a bridge between the other two (critique or denunciation and historical salvation). This dimension is of outmost importance in order to approach the historical salvation, the Kingdom of God.

People often see the prophets as pessimists, without appreciating the value of their message: they claim that their words were only denunciation and criticism, (44) rather than working towards a remedy to the social situation of their times. Denunciation has a positive element and it enables people to see their errors and to realize what has to change.

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(44) Santa Ana, p. 5.

Gustavo Gutierrez speaks of a denunciation and annunciation. (45) Denunciation which by nature also carries the good-news of how to approach the Kingdom. A prophetic denunciation is not done from an aseptic situation or position. It is necessary for the church as the prophetic voice to be in the world and to relate, identify, and be with the poor.

Denunciation, is achieved confronting a situation with the reality that is being announced: the love of the Father that calls everyone in Christ and through the action of the Spirit to a union with them and into a communion with him. (46)

By having the prophetic voices as samples for our days, we must realize that our denunciation-annunciation has to be based on the historical reality that surrounds us. For this reason Gutierrez also speaks that the annunciation of the Gospel has a concientizing effect. Here he is speaking of the politicizing function of the Gospel. (47)

With respect to the politicizing function of denunciation, Solle, Moltmann, as well as Metz clearly states that political theology is not a substitution of political ideas into theology, rather it is the perspective in which the prophets saw their function and mission - that is, in relation to the politics of God.

God speaks to individuals, and this approach made by

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(45) Gutierrez, p. 342-52.

(46) Ibid., p. 346.

(47) Ibid., p. 347.



God always is connected with an order from God to enter into his service. It is up to the person to decide to enter into that communion with God (48) and serve him.

To be participants of his politics, the politics that defends the poor and that is designed to prevent oppression and poverty, this is the base for the prophetic denunciation. It is not simple human politics. It comes from God, because people chooses the politics of the world, the politics of the Death Theology (49) forgetting that God's politics is trying to make us participants in his universal design, which is justice, love and righteousness.

In Deuteronomy 15 we read that God commands that there will not be poor among his people (v.4), but in case things do not work that way, God gives some rules: "If there is among you a poor [*Ebyon*] man, one of your brethen, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor [*Ebyon*] brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be." (v.7-8)

In order to prevent this situation of poverty, we read in Leviticus 25 that God states, first of all, that one

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(48) Jacques Ellul, The Politics of God and the Politics of Man (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1976), p. 55.

(49) CELADEC, Teologia de la vida, teologia de la muerte (Lima:CELADEC, 1980)

will not claim the land on perpetuity, for the land is his. We are sojourners and strangers on it (v.23). He commands us to redeem the land that he gave us. This is the year of the Jubilee, the year of the Lord.

Here we have the politics of God, a politic that every fifty years the total wealth will be distributed. If the poor cannot survive in the economical storm, they will be maintained by the people (Lev. 25:35).

The daily worker will be paid at the end of his/her work, that there shall be no oppression or stealing from the neighbor, that we shall do justice in judgement (Lev. 19:11-15).

The politics of God are designed to eliminate poverty and to defend the poor. When Jesus said: "You shall have the poor with you always.", he suggested that our failures to believe and act on God's politics will keep poverty and poor among us. This politic is the one that was defended by the prophets, the one that denounced and announced at the same time.

This politic is what guided and inspired Jesus to proclaim the Jubilee while reading the scroll of Isaiah, the politics that calls for the denunciation of injustices that tries to slow down God's design and reality.

Denunciation does not change any situation, either political, social or religious. It is necessary that conscientization takes place. It is in this manner that the poor and oppressed, by understanding the social injustices and the

system that have kept them poor must take the necessary steps to achieve a radical change in the society.

The prophets by accusing and denouncing the powerful and rich for their oppression on the poor gave conscience to the poor about their situation. This process of concientization means to unmask and reveal what is false, to empower the poor. It also means to place one's self in the situation of the other.

Through denunciation, the prophets expected to concienticise not only the poor and oppressed, but also the oppressor and leaders, each according to their transgressions.

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other goods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your father for ever. (Jer. 7:5)

The language of the prophets in their accusations is plain and clear, but their accusations are always accompanied with a warning after a clarification of the situation (Jer. 5:26ff).

3. Liberation of the Cult. The prophets spoke against the formalism of the cult, ritualism and sacrificial cleanliness that perverted the cult as a memorial of the liberating God. (50)

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(50) A. Cussianovich, Llamados a ser libres (LIMA:CEP, 1980), p. 80.

The cult in Jerusalem, as carried by the priests was attacked in efforts to correct it (Is. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:2ff; 8:8-9; 26:2ff; Amos 5:21-27; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-7). While reading these passages we can notice the strong language utilized to accused the type of cult: "I have had enough burnt offerings...I do not delight in the blood of bulls...Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me...Learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Is. 1:11ff)

There could not be a true cult without true devotion and justice toward God's creation (Hosea 6:6)

By multiplying their offerings the rich and powerful try to appear as righteous. With their riches they have tried to buy and manipulate God and the concientization by the prophets was a sound accusation of their corrupt deeds and their injustices even towards the worship of the God of the poor.

This type of religion is the opium of the people. They could put their hearts and minds at rest and continue living under the injustices and oppressions of the cult of, and for the rich, but Jeremiah expressed God's plan:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke...But this the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel...I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:31ff)

The liberating religion that God demands from his people is centered in justice (Amos), in love (Hosea), in faith (Isaiah), and in the conversion of values and of heart (Jeremiah). (51)

The best and most direct act of concientization done by the prophets comes from Jeremiah 22. Jehoiakim, the king, is denounced about his passion for fine buildings and for the injustices that he maintained: "who makes neighbor serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages" (v.13), and for the atrocities against the powerless "for shedding innocent blood" (v.7). Is a king proven by his building program? (v.15)

The central point of this concientization comes when Jeremiah tells the king that his father (King Josiah) did justice to the poor, acted righteously, and because of this, all was well with him.

This is not just denunciation. It is not only accusations. It is a call for reconciliation: acting justly and righteously is to know God. It is up to Johiakim to accept and enter into that reconciliation with God and the "other".

Hear the word of God, o King...you and your servants, and your people who enter these gates...do justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do not wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey

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(51) Ibid., p. 82-83.

this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David. (Jer. 22:2-4)

This is what concientization tries to accomplish: to unveil what is wrong in God's eyes, to unmask the false relationships between people and God, and to call people into returning to God in order to enter into his kingdom.

4. The Prophets and Salvific History. The prophets spoke to a present-future situation, they were a very conscious that God was a living God, a God concerned for his people now and here as well as in the future. But even so, the future was not a remote one.

The nature of the social order in which the people lived was of great concern to the prophets for they knew that the social order reflects the knowledge that people have of God. The temples in Jerusalem and Samaria had turned into ritualistic places, and the prophets were the persons that brought religion out of the temple and to the people.

In this context, salvation means to follow God's way: keep justice, and do righteousness for soon my salvation will come (Is. 56:1). This point is emphasized by the different Isaiahs. We find the prophets being concerned in how to achieve this salvific act: salvation is opening the gates of righteousness, perfect peace (social and not just spiritual), and justice, for God brought low (punished, destroyed) the inhabitants of the heights (rich, powerful) (Is. 26:1-10).

As the basic step towards this salvific act is the engagement of faith in an historical commitment. God existed and exists in the process of liberation of this people.

In the Exodus, the Israelites were between the Pharaoh's charging army and the Red Sea:

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of God, which he will work for you today." (Ex. 14:13)

That salvation was the separation of the waters that allowed the rebels to escape by crossing the Red Sea to freedom from their oppressors. This salvific act was history and remained an historical fact to the Israelites.

During the centuries, this concept of salvation was maintained by the prophets. Habakkuk refers to salvation as:

Thou went forth for the salvation of thy people, for the salvation of thy annointed [chosen people] (52). Thou didst crush the head of the wicked (53), laying him bare from the thigh to the neck. Thou didst pierce with thy shafts the head of his warriors who came like a whirlwinds to scatter me, rejoicing as if to devour the poor [Ani] in secret. (Hab. 3:13-14)

Salvation sometimes has to be achieved with violence. Liberation is an act of God. It is well known fact that the rich and powerful have never given up or consented to give up their power and their oppression on the poor out of their own free will.

We see in Habakkuk that God comes strong, crushing

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(52) Words empahsized are added by the author.

(53) In Hebrew it reads; "Thou didst crush the head of the house of the wicked..."

the head of the wicked, of those who devour the poor in secret.

We have seen that salvation then was a real situation in the life and history of the Israelites. This salvation was strongly related to justice, righteousness and love. The lack of justice is compared to no salvation by Isaiah 59:11. In a positive way Hosea emphasized:

Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek God that he may come and rain salvation upon you. (Hosea 10:12)

Christians fail sometimes to interpret salvation. We have put salvation beyond our reach by placing it in an apocalyptic realm. We miss salvation, and while we keep missing it, God continues to act in other ways and names: liberty to those who are oppressed, bringing hope and good news to the poor, shouting freedom to the captives, healing the sick and finding joy in the acceptable year of the Lord. All of these are the acts of God, they might be done by Christians, the Church, or a political force; it does not matter, for these salvific acts are from God.

### C. Prophecy and Politics

Elijah was the first prophet that had great impact in the political life of Israel. He annointed Jehu, initiating a new dynasty in the Northern kingdom (1 Kings 19:15-16). This act lead Jehu in a bloodbath on the previous king's



family and relatives (2 Kings 9-10). (54)

The prophet was well aware of the struggle that the Baal worshipers were having with the Yahwist, who desired to maintain their religion uncontaminated. Elisha sent a young prophet to anoint Jehu secretly as king of Israel. We have to conclude that the prophet knew and was behind the actions that Jehu took later, mass murder to clean and re-established the Yahwist cult.

When prophets like Elisha anointed kings and backed-up revolutions, it meant a direct involvement in politics.

This action was based on the fact that the prophets did not see a separation of religious and political responsibility from, and toward God. Naturally, the first contact with Yahweh resulted in a political and social revolution that took them out of Egypt, away from slavery.

Hosea, was one of those prophets entirely committed to the struggle of the people. He belonged to God and to the poor. At the same time his responsibility was toward the political reality of his country.

This was also part of his mission. He not only condemned the religious perversions of Israel, but he also made pronouncements on political grounds, on the military and political alliances (55) (5:13; 12:1-2).

On the religious-political aspect of the prophets,

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(54) Josephus, Ant., VI.

(55) Cussianovich, p. 87.

Rad said: "One of the prophecy's greatest achievements was to recapture for faith the dimension in which God had revealed himself par excellence, that of history and politics." (56)

The first leadership in the social community was charismatic, that is the case of Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon; but with Jephtahah we find the beginning of the non-charismatic leadership (Judge 11:5-11) (57).

The army was supplied with mercenary soldiers. Warfare, politics, and all the aspects of the society were left to the secular realm. It was the prophets who were shocked by this reality, recognizing that a gap in the relationship between the government and God had become wider. This situation became worse during Solomon's reign. After his death, the "new" prophets arose, the prophets that tried to bring God back into the central position in Israel's political responsibility.

Amos was well aware of his "call" and was not afraid in announcing the future exile. For this he was accused of getting involved in politics. Because of this denunciation to the government he was exiled (Amos 7:10-12).

Isaiah planned with Hezekiah, king of Judah, how to defend the city of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (2 Kings 19-20). Later we find that because of his activities, the prophet is

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(56) Rad, II, 182.

(57) Ibid. II, 95.

killed by order of King Manasseh (58).

In the same way we find that Jeremiah accepts and defends the idea of surrendering to the Babylonians, and told the king and people to do so. Due to his "political" preaching, he was arrested for treason, for disertation during Jerusalem's siege, was tortured, threatened with death, placed in a dungeon, and eventually he suffered exile into Egypt where he went accompanied by a group of insurgents, and died there. Ezekiel also was deported to Babylon between 597-587.

In Jeremiah 26:20-23 we find the prophet Uriah, "who spoke in the words of Jeremiah" against King Jehoiakim. Uriah escaped to Egypt to save his life, but the king had him extradicted and "slew him with the sword and cast his dead body into the burial place of the common people." (v.23) (59)

This shows us that the prophets understood and viewed religion and politics as something immediately related to the dynamic acts of God.

This total view of God's speakers launched them into international politics, as we can see in the first chapters of Amos. This is an interesting aspect of prophetic theology: to see how they were able to look at history in a

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(58) This is a midrash of 2 Kings 21:16. Isaiah's dead (sawed in two), appears on a pseudepigraph: Ascension of Isaiah.

(59) Crenshaw, p. 95.

new fashion (60), expanding their concept of God, from a national to a universal God.

It is then that they dared to speak against war situations and atrocities created by the "National Security" policy of the nations, like Babylon, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Moab (Amos 1-3; Is. 14:29-31; 15-16; 17:1-3; 23; 34; 63:1-6).

Jeremiah and Hosea also dealt in God's world, knowing that the direct result of any type of oppression, especially a foreign one, is a rejection of God and it brings suffering for the poor and the powerless.

The prophets understood that this dynamic relationship of God with the world was part of God's liberation which overflows the historical future of salvation, and which is expressed in a new historical act of God.

God acts faithfully to his design, and with this conviction the prophets assured the people with their words and lives that God will continue acting faithfully.

The liberation-salvation that Israel had in the political realm, through its history, forced the prophets to unmask the false nationalism, superiority, and the notion that they "possess" God, as a chosen people. The political liberation is not only the expression and the demand for a religious salvation, but the announcement that the new experience of God and the hope of knowing him in all his

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(60) Rad, II, 182.

plenitude is a grace that is poured upon all humanity.

And all the nations shall flow to it, and many people shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of God, to the house of the God of Jacob...He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many people." (Is. 2:2-4)

By bringing the tri-dimensional juncture: past, present, and present-future, the prophets expected not only a religious revolution, but more important a more responsible active participation in God's purpose. They expected a conversion of politics which is more profound and revolutionary.

### C H A P T E R   I I I

#### JESUS AND HIS SOCIAL CLASS

Gracias Señor, porque aun nuestra tarea profana es un gesto tuyo. Para hallarte no hay que retirarse en el egoismo; por el contrario, hay que sumergirse más en las cosas, hasta lo mas profundo: exprimir las hasta que gotee tu presencia.

(Luis Espinal, "Cristo Total", Oraciones a Quemarropa (Lima:CEP, 1982), p. 41.

A brief sketch of the socio-economical situation of Jesus times will help us to understand his world.

The Roman Empire possessed all the excessive production, especially through the customs controls of all the commercial flow. It was from Cesarea, the center of the Roman control, that the Procurator supervised all the tax collecting for Palestine and surrounding areas.

The rich Jewish class was composed of the royal court. It includes the Herodian family with the splendor of their courts, their palaces in Cesarea built with white imported Egyptian marble.

Herod's riches came from high taxes and extortion (1) Also in this economic group were the merchants, large land-owners, bankers, chief tax collectors [even though these people were not accepted socially], the Sanhedrin members, and the High Priest families. The wealth of this group came from the commerce related and connected to the Temple and from the Temple taxes that were imposed on Jews throughout the world. The Chief Priests were the wealthiest group in the society. (2) It can be seen that this class was very small.

The Sanhedrin was the body of government that ruled

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(1) Josephus tells of a delegation that went to Rome to oppose Herod's son and also charged Herod with the practice of illegal confiscation of private property. Ant. XVII. 11.2

(2) Richard J. Cassidy, Jesus, Politics and Society (New York:Orbis, 1978), p. 108.

Palestine; they did not have initiative or power over international politics or national defense. The main concern of this body was to rule over the internal affairs of the country according to the law, and to maintain the religious cult. (3)

The existence of a national body of government, or rule was a devious way of hiding the foreign oppression and "Jesus was well aware of the contradiction that erodes away the stability of the system." (4) Rome backed-up the domination imposed by these self appointed conductors of the nation. The blessing of the conquerors was needed to legitimate and perpetuate their oppression of the people. But, at the same time the credibility and prestige of the Jewish authorities started eroding due to the chaotic economic situation. This forced the ruling class to create police control [the Temple police] to maintain order and their position. In other words, the domination would be guarantee only by government violence, which was the violence of Rome and the violence of the rich-self-appointed ruling class.

The middle class was a reduced one, even though larger than the wealthy one. It was formed by traders and craftsmen, who worked in their own shops. Some priests also

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(3) Fernando Belo, A Materialistic Reading of the Gospel of Mark (New York:Orbis, 1981), p. 260.

(4) Hugo Echegaray, La práctica de Jesus (Lima:CEP, 1981), p. 79.



can be included, but most of them could be classified as poor. (5) Josephus tells of the priests economic situation; they had to go from field to house demanding that the people pay their tithes.

The largest group, or the poor, were divided in several levels. One consisted of the laborers, those who earned a living by doing daily tasks. They earned a denarius per day [this is equal to the minimum daily salary]. In this group are the rabbis: Hillel, who was a lay laborer; Shammai a carpenter; and Paul, a tent-maker. In the Matthean parable one reads about the workers standing in the market place, waiting patiently to be hired (Matt. 20:2-9).

A second level were the slaves. Most of them were found in the cities, as domestic workers, and usually they were gentiles. Much discussion has been given to the slavery of Jews, and it is believed that it existed in small numbers, usually as a result of indebtedness. (6)

The third and lowest group in this social class were the beggars, and Jerusalem was full of them. These people were those who depended on the alms from the others for survival. Among them were the sick, the lame, the blind, the leper, the destitute: the fatherless, and the widows. In Jesus' parables these people become the center of his

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(5) Compare the views of Cassidy p. 110 and Walter E. Pilgrim, Good News to the Poor (Minneapolis:Augsburg, 1981), p. 42.

(6) Pilgrim, p. 42.

teachings.

Jesus as son of a carpenter, and most likely a carpenter himself, since sons normally inherited the father's trade, had to belong to the middle class - if not economically, at least by profession. But, we can see that all the indications in the Gospels point towards a poor Jesus who belonged to the powerless, to those considered illiterates and ignorant, especially in religious matters - all of this meant permanent poverty.

"Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son?"

(Matt. 13:54-55). (7)

As we stated, carpentry was a profession which was well looked upon, and the profession of Jesus is stated merely as an identifier factor, rather than a derogatory statement. The question has a more implicit effect, since a person from the poor social strata did not have the ability or religious background to speak with "wisdom"; therefore, it is in this way that the reference to the "carpenter's son" is used to describe the social stigma and the segregation of the poor class, (8) but Jesus spoke with "authority".

On this respect, Echegaray said: "The question that the people raise, demonstrates the ambiguity that society projects over the lower social class. Their professional

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(7) Also see Mark 6:1-ff; Lk. 4:16-ff; John 7:15.

(8) Echegaray, p. 159.

abilities are appreciated, but they are despised for their ignorance which is automatically attributed to the poor." (9)

Jesus acted contrary to the normal expectations, we see a poor man not only expounding on the writings of Isaiah, but also stating that the prophecy is fulfilled in him, on a poor person.

The people at the synagogue were so amazed that all they dared to question was the poverty and/or ignorance that Jesus was supposed to have on religious matters. How can God operate through the poor, who are sinners? (10).

#### A. God Incarnated with the Poor

Yahweh, the God that the Israelites knew was not only a God from the Torah. Yahweh was a God that they knew through historical acts. Yahweh was God of history (Judg. 8:19; 1 Kings 17:1; 1 Sam. 17:26), and the God who participated in the lives of the people. The Bible makes fun of the gods from other people and nations:

Their idols are silver and gold,  
the work of men's hands.  
They have mouths, but do not speak;  
eyes, but do not see.  
They have ears, but do not hear,  
noses, but do not smell.  
They have hands, but do not feel;  
feet, but do not walk;  
and they do not make sounds in their throat.  
(Psalms 115:4-7)

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(9) Ibid.

(10) See Chapter II that deals with poverty in the Old Testament concepts.

But for Yahweh's word,

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and return not thither but water the earth.  
making it bring forth and prout, giving seed to the  
sower and bread to the eater, so that my word be that  
goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me  
empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and prosper in the things for which I sent it.  
(Is. 55:10-11)

This God operates through people - such was the case  
of Moses, as well as others that were instruments of God's  
plan. In the same manner a poor woman was chosen.

Mary, a person of faith, when chosen for her mission  
did not argue or doubt the act of the choosing of her person  
by God, her only concern was "How can this be, since I have  
no husband?" (Lk. 1:34). Here we have no doubt, but the lack  
of knowledge from the human sphere towards the Divine power.  
In Mary's act we remember the openness of the poor and the  
readiness to accept God, even if the service could cause  
death.

Mary was putting her life on the line, for according  
to the Jewish law of the Torah, a single woman that became  
pregnant out of wedlock should be stoned to death (Deut.  
22:20-21).

And so, God came down with and in the poor. This act  
was incomprehensible to the people of Zion. It was a  
scandal for God to come from the "underside"...."Can anything  
good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46; 7:41, 52)

The word spread out; a prophet arose and we find  
observers trying to see what kind of prophet Jesus was

descended from. (11) (Mtt. 4:25; Mk. 2:18,24; 3:2). Dumas expressed this disconcerting situation:

The tragedy was that God did not come through them, through their school, their customs; that God could intervene in the world from the people, transforming all things from a carpentry, from the life of a rural small town, from a poor neighborhood, from the setting of a grammar school, friends from childhood, domestic or housework and all the things from the life of the humble people...This is incredible, this cannot be. So "this man blaspheme", "he is an impostor", "possessed by a demon that "seduces the people", "is a heretic (a Samaritan)"...we have to arrest him so he will not mislead the people (Jn. 10:33; Mk. 2:7; Jn 7:20; 8:48; Mt. 27:63; Jn. 7:12, 47). When God comes, please, he shall come into the house like a real person...through the door of the decent people. (Jn. 7:48). (12)

The social status of Mary and her family can be established by her version of Sarah's poem when she visited her cousin Elizabeth (Lk. 1:46-55). Only a poor person can claim for a social revolution as she claimed, "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree" [the poor ones] (v.52).

What is important in this song is that it should be understood that the social reform is related directly and caused by Mary's concientization that she was carrying God's incarnation, Jesus the Liberator.

This act of the incarnation cannot keep her quiet; she has to express her hope for those of her class, those who have nothing and go hungry.

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(11) Benoit A. Dumas, Los dos rostros alienados de la Iglesia una (Buenos Aires:Latinoamerica libros, 1971), p. 75.

(12) Ibid., p. 75-76.

When we make the incarnation only an act that took place in Mary, we make of this act a God a mythology. God is incarnated in every poor person in the world; God is in the people that suffer violence when they claim better housing better pay, safer working conditions, peace on earth and human rights for the oppressed and the crushed. God's incarnation is actively present in us, but we have to take the commitment, as Jesus did when he went to John the Baptist to be initiated (Matt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22).

The message that John presented contained implicitly the seeds of social change: to those who were wealthier the demand was put forth to share with the poor, to those who had food to do likewise. To the tax collectors he told to be honest and to the soldiers, those who represent and are the powerful hands of the oppressors, John told not to rob, neither to torture and to be satisfied with their pay (Lk. 3:10-14).

All of these were representatives of God's justice. John was announcing the coming of the kingdom of God.

When John was imprisoned, he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the long waited Messiah. They found Jesus working with and in solidarity with the poor, with those who suffered injustices and oppression by the system (Is. 58:6; 61:1-2; Lk. 4:18-19).

Jesus was a rabbi, but a rabbi of the poor. He not only taught in the synagogue, he preached on open fields, from boats close to the shore of lakes, at parties and din-

ners. Most of his followers were not of good reputation, most certainly the class of people that a decent rabbi would avoid: prostitutes, tax collectors, women, children, sinners, and revolutionaries. But what made Jesus radically different from a "normal" rabbi was the way he taught. A rabbi as an interpreter of the scriptures utilized the Torah and the traditions to expound his views, giving in this way validity to his teachings. Jesus, on the contrary used an exegesis based on the need of the people in relation to the justice of God. Jesus' teaching were based on the relationship he had with God, the reality, and the present need of the people that were listening to his teachings.

It is in this relationship that Jesus knew God, and to know God is to be just and righteous. To know God is to recognize him, to know him in his suffering and in his poverty, and it is this knowledge that draws us horizontally rather than upward, (13) towards situations that are here, situations in which God incarnates himself in the suffering of the people, especially in the suffering of the poor.

When Jesus felt or saw that the religious leaders were standing between God and the people by corrupting and perverting the scriptures in order to serve their purposes, he confronted the injustices that the leaders hide behind their robes. He expressed his indignation, "Woe to you,

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(13) Juergen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (New York:Harper & Row, 1967), p. 118.

scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites..." (Mtt. 23:15).

Rather than calling Jesus a rabbi, it would be better to call him a popular teacher who was knowledgeable in the law. But before being a "popular teacher", Jesus was the incarnation of God in the poor, for it is only the poor that move history, and it is through the poor that person can be saved, and liberated. (14)

To be incarnated by God is to know God: "Everyone who does justice is born of God" (1 John 2:29), following 1 John one also reads: "Everyone who loves is born of God (4:7). Here one can see a correlation between love and justice.

#### B. The Announcement of the Kingdom to the Poor

Chapter 2 presented the double meaning of the word poor, especially in the context of the "poor of Yahweh", which came from the Essenes of the Qumram communities. The word poor [*'Ebyon*] occurs about fifteen times in their writing. Afflicted, or humble [*'Ani*], was used six times and humility [*'Anaw*], used eight times.

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(14) Even if history points out that it is not the poor, but those that identify with them, the ones that change history, those changes are caused by the oppression and suffering of the poor which in the end are the force that drives any person to get in solidarity with this social class. This is the redemptive and salvific act of God offered through the poor.



The Essenes believed that salvation would come with the direct apocalyptic intervention of God in history. This action was going to take place at the time of the war between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.

Before Jesus began his ministry, John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing. This prophet is one of the least reported person in the Bible, even though his preaching is of importance for the kingdom, the poor and to the ministry of Jesus.

John preached to the people, by the Jordan river, in contrast to the Essenes who usually lived in their communities in Qumram where they remained isolated from the world, and did not preach or try to get converts.

John proclaimed "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mtt. 3:2). This language that John used is related to that used by Jesus. (15) This becomes clear when he was baptizing:

Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire... He who has coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise... Collect no more than is appointed to you... Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and to content with your wages. (Lk. 3:9-14)

These words were addressed by John to wealthy people [those who have extra possessions - clothes, food, money,

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(15) John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1979), p. 27.

etc.] and to the military [Rob no one by violence or by accusation]. These words were addressed to the powerful and to those who kept the powerful in their position as oppressors.

This was the language of denunciation and it could not be spiritualized, but at the same time these words were the language of "good news" to those who suffered the oppression and exploitation of the powerful.

After John, Jesus came using the same proclamation (Mtt. 4:17), with one difference: Jesus' proclaimed his message with authority and not as their scribes (Mtt. 7:29).

Jesus' proclamation was clear and precise. He spoke of the imminence of the kingdom: the good news to the poor.

1. Luke 4:16-30. In this passage we find that most of it is a Lukan addition to the other Synoptic Gospels. In Mark 6:1-6, and in Matthew 13:54-58, we see the parallel story, but Luke places Jesus in the synagogue and reading from the Isaiah's Scroll. This passage at Nazareth is a crucial one, for it is here where we have a preview of Jesus' work:

- His prophetic ministry.
- The annunciation of God's salvation-time.
- The realized eschatology of his message.
- Jesus' concern for the poor, crushed and those who suffer.

The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, (16)  
because Yahweh has annointed me  
to bring joyful tidings to the poor;  
he has sent me to.....(17)  
proclaim release to the captives,  
and the opening of eyes  
to those who are bound;  
to send away in liberty those  
who have been crushed, (18)  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

There have been great discussions trying to determine if Jesus read Isaiah because there was a Jewish lectionary, or if the Spirit guided him to look for this particular passage in Isaiah; which according to Luke, this Scroll was handed to him. All of these presuppositions are of secondary importance for it is in this passage that one finds a midrash with which Jesus not only identified himself, but stated that he was the chosen one, and he identified himself with the prophets Elisha and Elijah. The question that must be dealt with is:

- Who are the poor, the captive, and the crushed ones?

This passage has been spiritualized and even ignored of its plain but radical meaning. (19)

When Jesus finished with his reading he placed him-

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(16) The following is my own translation of what Jesus appears to have read from the Isaiah Scroll.

(17) Here is the first discrepancy between what Luke reports and the Isaiah version: "he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted,". If Jesus did not read this portion it could mean that he did an Isaiah midrash. One opinion by Pilgrim, p. 182 n.6, is that Luke wanted to avoid the spiritualization of the words "broken in heart".

(18) This sentence is not from Is. 61, it is from 58:6.

(19) Pilgrim, p. 66.

self in the prophetic line (20) finishing the midrash by bringing in Elisha and Elijah. If one take the entire pericope it has to be agreed that the year of the Lord's favor was the one explained in Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15, which dealt with the Jubilee Year. Also, Isaiah 58:6-7 and 42:3, 7 are important passages to the understanding of the prophetic role of Jesus in relation to the midrash at Nazareth.

Isaiah mentioned justice in 42:3 and this was the sole reason for the action taken in verse 7: the opening of the eyes in this verse is parallel to the release of the prisoners from the dungeons, since they sat in darkness. The parallelism is double:

I, Yahweh, have called to you to serve the cause of  
right; I have taken you by the hand and formed you;  
I have appointed you as a covenant of the people and  
light of the nations,  
to open the eyes of the blind,  
to free captives from prison,  
and those who live in darkness from the dungeon.  
(Is. 42:6-7)

It is found that the opening of eyes and light is always related in the Bible. Also, this relation is based on the justice from God; it is this divine justice that in righteousness so that his "light" will liberate the prisoners from the dungeons. A closer relationship can be found

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(20) James A. Sanders, Torah & Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 96-ff. Sanders draws a comparison between the hermeneutics employed by Jesus on the Isaiah passage and the Qumran hermeneutics, concluding that Jesus had a prophetic hermeneutics.

in Is. 51:4 where "Yahweh's justice is given for a light to the peoples", and in Chapter 60 as a result of the light that comes, the oppressor and the proud shall be no more (60:14), and the workers will not be exploited and the "taskmakers will be righteous" (60:17).

The poor to which Jesus refers are the physically poor, without spiritualizing their condition. It is under this light that it is possible to bring in a comparison to the Sermon on the Plain (Lk. 6:20), in which to those poor to whom the joyful tidings are brought are also the blessed ones, those that will receive the Kingdom of God.

These joyful tidings were not other than the proclamation of what was to be done: to go to the root of the social injustices that existed, to comprehend that salvation or liberation takes place in an historical setting and it comes from God who became flesh in a society struggling for human dignity as God's daughters and sons. (21)

It is for this reason that Jesus lived and worked with the poor, confronting the scandal of offering the Kingdom to the margined, the prisoners and the crushed ones by the present social system. The context of Isiah 58:6 supports this.

This is the "joyful tiding" of liberation, the same liberation that one find in the Magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55),

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(21) Gustavo Gutierrez, La fuerza historica de los pobres (Lima:CEP, 1980), p. 272.

where the Virgin Mary proclaims God's salvation based on justice for the poor, "but also the authentic compromise with all of humanity, our brothers, specially with the poor and needy and for the necessary transformation of society." (Juan Pablo II, Zapopan, 4). (22)

Even though allusions have been made that Jesus was proclaiming the Jubilee Year as the year of the Lord's favor, it has to be clarified that Jesus was really proclaiming the kingdom of God. The Jubilee apparently was utilized as a symbol of justice and liberation for God's Kingdom.

In this passage from Luke it is common to utilize the hermeneutic of finding how Jesus proclaimed the preaching and the promise of the evangelization of the gentiles, but in the desperation to prove our right to accept the traditional hermeneutic, one overlooks the simple fact that Zarephath, the woman of Sidon (1Kings 17:8-24), and Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-14) were people oppressed and bowed down. Zarephath was poor, a widow with a child in times of famine, and a Phoenician woman. Elijah "sustained her and she sustained him, precisely in the period when he was not accepted by his own government." (23)

Naaman was powerful, valiant and proud, but also a leper which in society is considered repugnant and the object

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(22) As stated in Romaldo Munoz, "Evangelio y Liberacion en America Latina", in La Teologia Pastoral de Puebla (Santiago: Vicaria de la Solidaridad, 1980), p. 26-27.

(23) James A. Sanders, "Jesus Opens the Scroll", Concern (June 1978), p. 8.

of rejection. The oppression of the general was his sickness but his sin was his proudness and arrogance.

This reading of Isaiah 61 by Jesus was his first political manifesto, as Pedro Rafael said in one of the encounters at Solentiname, Nicaragua:

Pedro Rafael: And so he makes it clear, with deeds more than with words, that he is the Messiah, the announced liberation. This was his first political manifesto.

Laureano: The truth is that all those people - blind, imprisoned, afflicted - they are the poor.

Pedro Rafael: And you have to see, as a contrast, the negative part too. He didn't come to give any news to the rich but to talk to the poor. He didn't come to give health to those who are happy but to those who have problems, to the afflicted. He didn't come to be the ally of those who put people in jail but to free the prisoners. And he didn't come to blindfold people's eyes but to make them see. And he didn't come to oppress but to put an end to oppression and to proclaim total liberation. Let nobody falsify these words, as it often happens. And he said it in church! (24)

This is the struggle for a just world, a world in which no person will be oppressed by another person, there will be no alienation or egotism. In this struggle will be found the real meaning for the coming of the kingdom. This kingdom and social injustices are incompatible. (25)

To bring justice in society, to open the eyes to free those in prison and to liberate those crushed by the weight of the injustices of the social system is the struggle for the kingdom of God.

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(24) Ernesto Cardenal, The Gospel in Solentiname (New York:Orbis, 1976), p. 131-32.

(25) Gustavo Gutierrez, Teologia de la liberacion (Salamanca:Sigüeme, 1980), p. 168.

2. The Nature of the Kingdom of God. Jesus announced the presence of the kingdom as something concrete and dynamic which implied the power of God over Satan. The Kingdom of God then is the presence of the power, without limit, the permanent power, that excludes all what is weak, and corrupted, and here is the difference between this kingdom and the falacy of this world (26) where humanity relys solely on human efforts, technological conquests, weapons and wealth.

The power of the kingdom is also over the Satanic dominion. The salvific power of God makes itself present, brings justice to the oppressed - the justice that has never been achieved, and brings a new world without suffering, sin or death, without blindness, leprosy, poverty, crushed ones or deafness. There is no reign of God without the actual presence of God's salvific power.

Jesus made this presence of God's salvific power a reality, especially when John's disciples were sent to ask if he was the One. The answer came by demonstrating this power in action, bringing salvation, healing, and liberating the people. (Mtt. 11:5, Lk. 7:22) (27)

By this action Jesus anounced that the promised kingdom through the prophets was present, and in this promise

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(26) Antonio Rodriguez Carmona, "El Reino de Dios en el pensamiento de Jesus", Estudios Biblicos (39:3-4, 1981), 259-261.

(27) This two parallel of the Synoptics are related to Isaiah 29:18-21; 35:5-7; 61:1-2.



can be seen the connection that Jesus brought between the Old and the New Testament, making God's action and history one, with a period of promise and another of fulfilment.

The kingdom that was announced to the poor included a society without class in which the rich were asked to give their wealth to the poor.

The salvation that was offered in this kingdom was not only a political salvation, but something more radical because it dealt with the present historical salvation, and also with the transcendental salvation. On the temporal level, as an approach to the total kingdom, political salvation is a must, but the transcendental, or the fulfilment of that kingdom is the divine liberation in its totality. (28)

It can be said that the announcement of the kingdom by Jesus was "good news" for the poor, but "bad news" for the rich. Jesus proclaimed that the demands of the kingdom were radical: "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mk. 8:36; Mtt. 16:26; Lk. 9:25)

This thought was the one expressed to the young rich ruler (Mtt. 19:16-30; Mk. 10:17-31; Lk. 18:18-30), when Jesus answered him that in order to inherit eternal life - a symptom of the kingdom, he had to sell all he had and give to

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(28) Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Da libertacao: O Teologico das Libertacoes Socio-Historicas (Petropolis: Editoras Vozes, 1979), p. 77.

the poor (ptochois).

You cannot serve God and Mammon (Mtt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). It is in this sense that Jesus refers to a radical kingdom, where our belonging to the community has to alter our present ways of responding to God and the "Other".

Rosemary Ruther, in her book "The Radical Kingdom", speaks about the needed or required changes for the understanding of that kingdom:

While the Christian message implicitly carried a social revolutionary idea, in practice, after the absorption of the apocalyptic message of the new age into the age of the church and the projection of the fulfillment of the gospel into an other-worldly heaven unrelated to future history, this potential could only be released through the secularization of the society, the dethroning of the Christian establishment. (29)

This statement as radical as it sounds is not far at all from Jesus' teachings. He dethroned the Temple and the priests; he rejected the leaders, the Pharisees, the rich, and the establishment that was composed of the Saducees and the Sanhedrin. He repudiated the unjust Jewish laws in order to bring forward God's law of justice and righteousness for the widow, the fatherless, the poor, the oppressed and the imprisoned.

This radicalism, as expressed by the Virgin Mary in the Magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55), was put in practice by Jesus. Those actions made him a radical, and he was accused of causing political uprising, of blasphemy, and of being re-

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(29) Rosemary Ruther, The Radical Kingdom (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), p. 17.

belious and the fomentor of a coup. His arrest (typical of political arrests in Latin America during the night) and his trial at closed doors denote the political implications of the arrest and murder.

Luke states that he was "reckoned with transgressors" (22:37). The Greek word used is "anomos" which indicates illegal, evildoer, malefactor. (30) In the Twentieth century, one hears the terms: terrorist, rebel, guerrilla, communist.

The radicalism of the kingdom in favor of the poor and the oppressed and in favor of justice and righteousness caused the prophets and the announcers of the kingdom to suffer violence [basileia ton ouranon biazetai], (Mtt. 11:12). The Beautitudes are God's teachings which prevents this kingdom to be forcibly treated. The blessings are in reality a manifestation of God, rather than a manifestation of the poor. God is the defender of the poor, and also their protector and liberator.

As a result God is "humanize". (31) Modern man attempts to make God more comprehensive and more in line with personal interests - God should love with preference those, like us, the good people, the blessed [rich] by him; forgetting that in the Beautitudes and through history He came to bless the poor and the oppressed by announcing the

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(30) Adolf Holl, Jesus in Bad Company (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 21.

(31) Echegaray, p. 172-73, n. 124.

reality of the kingdom.

That is why the Bible does not tell or explain how to worship God, but it tells us to be in solidarity with the poor. (32)

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.  
(Luke 6:20)

### C. The Temple: Politics and Economics

Of all the edifices built through the history of the Hebrew civilization, the Temple was the most important in the life of the nation. The Temple included the actual edifice, with its courts in the city of Jerusalem - the Temple built by king Solomon, the Second Temple after the Babylonian exile, built during Nehemiah and Ezra, and the Third Temple of Herod the Great.

The life of the people and of the nation revolved and gravitated around the Temple. It was the bank, political authority, religious control center, place of worship and place for all sorts of human transactions. (33)

During the Babylonian captivity, the Hebrews found themselves without a Temple and far from Jerusalem. The absence of the Temple forced them, in their religious zeal, to develop the concept of the Synagogue. After their return to Palestine, the Synagogue model was carried with the

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(32) Gutierrez, La fuerza, p. 90.

(33) Echegaray, p. 87.

people. The Temple rebuilt in Jerusalem remained mainly as a place for the offering of sacrifices, the place where Yahweh abode, the symbol of the unity of the Hebrew faith, and the place where every loyal Jew, from the diaspora or from Palestine, tried to visit at least twice during their life time.

The religious and the political life of Israel were viewed as one, particularly since the Exodus. For the Jews it was inconceivable to think of politics in other than religious terms. Yahweh was a God that acted and responded to them through history.

During the life of Jesus this theocracy was centered on the Sanhedrim and in the High Priestly families. Also, at that time, Israel was occupied by the Roman army; the "Pax Romana" had imposed the "Roman peace" on the world, and the Jews only had the freedom of retaining their religion. Under this world political situation, several theo-political parties or groups existed.

1. The Saducees. This theo-political party was composed of the rich and wealthy people, and also the High Priest families which included most of the Sanhedrim . This oligarchy was started before the time of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (34)

The Hellenization of Israel, after the Persian period

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(34) Charles Duell Kean, God's Word to His People (Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1951), p. 131.

initiated by Alexander the Great, raised questions about the interpretation of the Torah. The Saducees placed themselves as the keepers of orthodoxy, tradition and custom. They attempted to retain the position and privileges of the ruling class, at the same time finding ways to accommodate themselves into the Greek world of commerce and philosophy. In order to exercise and retain their power, they gave the Temple great importance, while they made concessions in other areas of religion.

According to Josephus, the "Saducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them." (35)

It can be said that the Saducees party was the "status quo", the "establishment". They were the aristocracy of the economy, as well as of the social and political life.

Religiously they were faithful and believed only in what was written on the Torah. They did not believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body; neither did they believe in punishment or reward after life, nor in demonology or angelology.

2. The Pharisees. This was the party of the opposition that sprang during the Macabean days, out of the Hasidim movement. They desired to maintain the Jewish community life against the Hellenistic influence by putting the Torah as the

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(35) Josephus, Ant. XII, 10.6.

center of the commonwealth, with no compromising on customs and practice.

While the Saducees concentrated their power on the Torah, the Pharisees channeled their efforts and strength through the Synagogues. This and their moral ways and traditions made them respected among the people. (36) "The [Pharisees] have so great a power over the multitude, that when they say something against the king or against the high priest, they are believed." (37)

It was during the rule of John Hyrcanus that the Pharisees suppressed the Saducee party, but during the Macabee rulers - who at first were Pharisee, but eventually became Saducee, that the Sanhedrim became the stronghold for the oligarchy. The Pharisees were not entirely pushed out of this legislative body and continued with some influence, mainly through the control of the population.

With respect to their religious beliefs, they were more strict than the Saducees, looking for purity on fulfillment of the law, but in another ways they were less conservative. In addition to the Torah, they had oral traditions, which for them had religious validity. This oral tradition, eventually was written down, giving existence to the Talmud through the Mishnah. (38)

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(36) John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), p. 464

(37) Josephus, Ant. XIII, 10.5

(38) Bright, p. 464.

They also believed that only some actions were the work of fate, and that others were within ones own power and control. They accepted the existance of the soul, and believed that the souls of good people were reincarnated, while those of bad people suffered eternal punishment.

3. The Zealots. Even though the Zealots were not recognized by Josephus and other historians of those days as a formal political party, the Zealots, as freedom-religious-fighters, played a very important part in the life and politics of Israel, the mission of Jesus (39), and later in the Jewish revolts of 66-70 and 132-35 B.C., which ended with the total destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

The Zealots were militant Jews who despised the Roman occupation because the gentile oppressors humiliated their Zionist pride. Also their presence as a political and economic, as well as religious, occupation force, was an insult to Yahweh and His sacred nation (40).

They were fanatically brave and religious; they were also known by the Latin name of "sicarii", which means cut-throats, bandits. This name also was used for them because

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(39) Among the Apostles, Jesus had at least two Zealots: Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot. There is also a possibility that Peter and the Zebedee brothers could have been Zealots. For more detail see Oscar Cullmann, The State in the New Testament (New York:Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956).

(40) Echegaray, p. 145. "The opposition to Ceasar as absolute ruler emerges from the deepest orthodox theology, from the practical monoteism of Israel."



they used small swords. (41). They held the belief that once they initiated the war of independence, God would come to their aid. This was the highest ideal of the Zealots, the Messianic expectation, (42) and becoming the perpetrators of the Macabean spirit. (43)

It is interesting that Josephus does not deal with the Zealots as a social or political group that exerted political and religious pressure on the life and destiny of Israel. Considering the history of Josephus life (44), he addressed the Zealots as murderers, robbers, and plunderers. (45)

The Essenes were another group whose concept of Judaism made them hate all non-Essenes, Jews or gentiles. They rejected the Temple because for them it was not clean and pure. They lived waiting for the apocalyptic war where the Sons of Light (those from their sect) would fight with God's assistance against all others (Sons of Darkness).

At the time of the Jewish war, the Essenes became involved in the fighting, but prior to it they lived with an expectation of no active participation in social or political

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(41) Josephus, Ant. XX, 8, 10.

(42) Cullmann, p. 16.

(43) W.R. Farmer, Macabees, Zealots and Josephus (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956)

(44) Josephus, a Jew, fought against the Romans, later he switched armies. After the destruction of Jerusalem, he went to Rome from where he wrote a Jewish apologetic history.

(45) Josephus, Ant. XX. 8, 10.

life.

In all of this religious-political world, where did Jesus stand?

It is well attested that Jesus of Nazareth was tried, sentenced, tortured, and executed on a cross by the Romans. During the first 30 years of our era thousands of Jewish rebels or revolutionaries died by crucifixion; (46) therefore, Jesus was not the first or the last person to die under such ignominious conditions. His type of death does not make him unique, but we Christians have spiritualized it with a simplistic theology of the cross, forgetting that this type of death was a political one, according to Roman law.

Jesus, somehow, was found guilty of some type of conspiracy (revolt) and of trying to overthrow Ceasar as ruler of Palestine.

And they began to accuse him saying,  
"we found this man perverting our nation,  
and forbidding us to give tribute to Ceasar,  
and saying that he himself is Christ a King."  
(Luke 23:2)

The mere fact that the sign above the cross "Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum", confirms our suppositions. At the same time it marked Jesus clearly as a social outsider.

This is not to prove that Jesus acted in a criminal way. Criminal behaviour is relevant to what the State considers to be dangerous. Legal charges were made in terms of the legal norms upon which the society in which

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(46) Josephus, War II. 5, 2.

Jesus lived operated. (47)

With whom did Jesus sympathize? How he expressed himself towards the Saducees and the Pharisees is known, but what about the Zealots and the Essenes?

If one analyzes Jesus' actions and behaviour under the light of the law of the Empire, one would have to agree that his behaviour, not only broke the law (criminal behaviour) of the Jews; but also broke the political laws of the Empire.

From the Roman point of view, Jesus was guilty - like the Zealots - of provoking or instigating a coup and it clearly appeared to the Romans that his intentions of becoming king of one of the Roman provinces placed him as a revolutionary (48). But, Jesus was conscious of being the Messiah, sent by his Father not to initiate a kind of kingship, but the kingdom of God.

"Are you king of the Jews"  
Jesus answered "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?"  
"My kingship is not of this world, my servants will fight, that I will not be handed over to the Jews." (John 18:33-36)

Also, by Jesus' actions the Roman and Jewish power-holders, saw a political threat in Jesus when he entered triumphant. The memory of Zechariah's passage most likely came to mind when a triumphant Messiah entered the city:

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(47) Holl, p. 23.

(48) Cullmann, p. 25.

Rejoice greatly, O daughters of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughters of Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on an ass,  
on a colt the foal of an ass. (Zech. 9:9)

Definitely we see revolutionary intentions in that verse and the continuing verses. Another aspect of that entry was the use of palm branches to greet Jesus.

W. R. Farmer correlates their presence in Jesus' entry and as a symbol used for the Macabean resistance against foreign oppression. (49)

Jesus was not a religious fanatic like the Essenes. He rejected the concepts of the Zealots who wanted to change the government: a foreign one for a nationalistic one. Jesus rejected the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in religious matters and condemned the Saducees for what they did with religion. Jesus wanted to bring a new government, like the Zealots, but a government of God - His kingdom.

Jesus wanted purity of religion, but by acting justly and righteously. Jesus' ideas transcended temporal things or concepts, though they included these concerns.

4. The Incident at the Temple. The Synoptic Gospels present the Temple incident at the end of Jesus' ministry, and according to Matthew, Luke and Mark this was why the Chief Priests and the Scribes looked for an opportunity to

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(49) W. R. Farmer, "The Palm Branches in John 12:13", Journal of Theological Studies (1952) 62ff.

kill him (Mk. 11:18; Lk. 19:47).

John deviates from the previous sequence and he presents this incident at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (2:13-17).

Trocme' has shown that the Temple incident took place, most likely, in an earlier visit by Jesus to Jerusalem (50).

The Temple was the bank, political authority, religious control center, place of worship and place for all sorts of human transactions. (51) To touch one of these aspects was to confront all the other facets of the system.

Jesus travelled constantly between Galilee and Jerusalem. Mark and the later Synoptics have Jesus' earlier stories which took place in Galilee, and it is only at the end of his mission that he is moved to Jerusalem, where he gets involved in the Temple incident and is later crucified.

In his story John is not concerned with a smooth geographical narration. He has Jesus moving from one city to another, (52) and he places this incident at the beginning of his mission. Trocme' shows that the Temple incident takes place in his early life and because of it he achieves national popularity. (53) In the context of this

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(50) Etienne Trocme', Jesus and His Contemporaries (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 110-15.

(51) Echegaray, p. 87.

(52) In the first two chapters, John places Jesus at Bethany (1:28-29), Galilee (1:43), Cana (2:1), Capernaum (2:12), and Jerusalem (2:13)

(53) Trocme, p. 110-13.

early popularity, the approach of Nicodemus (John 3:1-ff), a Pharisee "ruler of the Jews" (member of the Sandrehim), looking for advice from Jesus makes sense.

But what really happened in the Temple?

Definetly it was not a "purification of the Temple"; neither was it an opposition to the sacrificial religious rites of the Temple. Jesus was a Jew, and as a Jew he participated in those rites. We know that he was raised by fulfilling the law of the Torah (Lk. 2:22-24). It has to be concluded that it was an attack on the "sacerdotal aristocracy" (54) and the abuses committed by them on the trade and money exchange. Jesus was not trying to achieve power - political or economic. He was not trying to clean or purify the Temple, as the people expected the Messiah to do. His concern was simple and purely a concern for the exploitation of the powerful on the less fortunate: the poor, who came in their humbleness to worship God.

According to Mark (11:11-ff), when Jesus entered Jerusalem, he went to the Temple, but "as it was late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve". It is not until the next day that he returned to the Temple to make his attack. Regardless of the Markan or the other versions, it has to be said that this action by Jesus was not an irrational spontaneous reaction. Rather it was a well planned and executed

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(54) Oscar Cullmann, Jesus and the Zealots (Manchester: Manchester Press), p. 331

attack. He made himself a "lash out of rope" [fragellion ek schoinion] (John 2:15), and drove out, whipping "all" [pantas], meaning sheep, oxen, and people. John indicates that Jesus had a different attitude towards those selling pigeons (v.16) (55). He also threw the money and overturned the tables of the money exchangers. (56)

The question that must be raised is: How could Jesus do all these things single handed? The Temple had its own police whose duty was to put out or prevent this type of riot, and to see that the Temple business was not interrupted. (57)

Cullmann concludes that Jesus had to have powerful support from his followers who prevented any action or intervention by the Temple police, (58) and probably other people also rallied behind Jesus action.

In summary, Jesus attacked the system of false religiosity that was oppressing the people, especially the poor. The sacerdotal aristocracy was growing richer and richer since they controlled the Temple business.

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(55) Pigeons were the animals that were presented as an offering by the poor. This could be the reason why Jesus acted more benignly with them.

(56) In order to pay the annual Temple tax, the males had to exchange Roman currency into the Biblical Shekel. Mtt. 17:24-26 represents Jesus paying this tax. The Shekel was the only money that the Temple would accept for religious reasons.

(57) Cullmann, Jesus and the Zealots, p. 333.

(58) Ibid.

In a sense the terms "cleansing of the Temple", are appropriate when used to refer to cleaning it of the false gods that controlled and impoverished the poor and took advantage of their faith and sincerity.

Jesus was attacking the Temple because in it the wrong politics and the wrong economics had taken place. It had ceased to be his Father's house; it was turned into Jerusalem's "Wall Street", where money was the ruler of the false kingdom. By this action Jesus was claiming the right and authority that God's servants have to speak out against injustice and oppression, whether it comes from the church or earthly governments.

It was this action that took Jesus to the cross. His opposition to the powerful rich aristocracy in defense of justice and righteousness caused them to bear that a popular uprising would take place:

So the Chief Priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on this, every one will believe him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and the nation". But one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."  
(John 11:47-50)

#### D. The Cross and the Poor

The popularity of Jesus began to be a dangerous situation for the authorities. It was believed that he preached subversion and, as a Zealot, was actively involved



in overthrowing the rulers of Palestine. This was not the only reason they feared him. Apparently the Sanhedrin leaders and the High Priests could not accept this miserable poor man as the Liberator of the people, and as one who was taking their lawful place as a religious leader. In fact, they feared for their positions of power and positions of privilege - the privileges of controlling the Temple market and the privilege of taking the first seats at the tables of their masters, the Romans.

Jesus the one that walked, dined, and drank with sinners, the one that forgave sins and helped the sick was turned over to the Romans for the death sentence.

Theologians have noticed differences in the several versions of Jesus' trials. Jewish scholar Paul Winter (59) points to the obvious fact that for centuries Christians have overlooked the Roman blame for Jesus crucifixion, and focused all the hate on the Jews. In his argument he states that the Sanhedrin at Jesus' time possessed the power to try capital cases and did not need to go to Pilate. Also, Jesus died in the Roman fashion, with the crucifixion being carried out by the Roman soldiers.

M. Goguel in his book "The Life of Jesus" (60) states that:

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(59) Paul Winter, On the Trial of Jesus (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961)

(60) As stated in Hugh Anderson (ed.) Jesus (Englewood Cliffs:Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 82-83.

Until the eve of the war, instances, occurred in which Jewish sentences were pronounced and carried out. Rabbi Eliezer ben Zadok, who died before 130 of our era, tells that when he was a child he was present at the execution of the daughter of a priest, who was burned alive because she had been convicted of adultery. (Sanhedrim 7,2,52b)

Josephus states that until the time of Cuspius Fadus and Tiberius Alexander, that is until the year 48, the Romans did not disturb the Jewish customs "making no alterations of the ancient laws, kept the nation in tranquility." (61)

Looking at the Gospels we find two trials for Jesus, each with different charges. One was conducted by "the High Priests, and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes (who) gathered" (Mk. 14:53; Mtt. 26:57; Lk. 22:66; John 18:12-ff). This was the gathering of the "economic power [the elders], political power [the Chief Priests], and logical power [the scribes]". (62)

During this interrogation, Jesus was accused of two charges: announcing the destruction [by him] of the Temple (Mtt. 26:61; Mk. 14:58), and calling himself the Son of God (Mtt. 26:63; Mk. 14:61-62; Lk. 22:70). It is only according to Mark and Matthew that a death verdict was passed on Jesus; not by the Sanhedrin, but by this power circle. (63)

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(61) Josephus, War II, 1.6.

(62) Belo, p. 217.

(63) Not all of the Sanhedrim was against Jesus (Mtt. 27:57; Lk. 23:50; Act 5:34-ff). The Gospels give the impression that a unanimous vote was cast. It is known that the Pharisee were members of the Sanhedrim and they are not mentioned in Jesus' trial.

The second trial occurred when Jesus was carried by the Chief Priests and Scribes to the Imperial power: Pilate, the Procurator. The messianic trial continued, but from a different angle. This time as usurper of the throne and a danger to Caesar. As such the question was put to him: "Are you the king of the Jews?" most definitely a very political question.

All of this brings the question, why two trials, especially with different charges? Is it true as Anderson states that "The whole story of the hearing before the Jewish High Court is unhistorical" (64)

Was the Jewish trial invented by the oral tradition (65) to play down the Roman responsibility for Jesus' death and at the same time to put more emphasis on the Jewish blame?

The obvious result of this simple analysis is that Jesus was sentenced by the Roman Procurator, tortured and killed by the Roman soldiers.

It will have to be admitted that Jesus' death was a political one.

Josephus recorded the death of James, the brother of Jesus. (66) In it we see that the High Priest, Ananus, as-

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(64) Anderson, p. 76.

(65) During the first part of the first century, Christian-Jewish conflicts led to animosity between the two religious groups.

(66) Josephus, Ant. XX, p.1.

sembled the "Sanhedrim of the judges", where James was tried and convicted to be stoned to death. This was a Jewish trial with a Jewish sentence for breaking Jewish religious laws. Goguel cites Regnault as using this passage from Josephus to prove that the Jews could not apply capital punishment without Roman approval, since Josephus tells us that Albinus, the new Procurator, when he reached Jerusalem and found that the Chief Priest had called on the Sanhedrim without his approval, deposed Ananus. Albinus was informed by those who met him on his way from Alexandria to Jerusalem, that Ananus did not have the authority to assemble the Sanhedrim without the Procurator's consent but this does not mean that the Sanhedrim could not pass a death sentence if they had the authorization to meet.

This could have been the situation in Jesus case, so Regnault's defense is weak.

This method of punishment, crucifixion, was originated by the Persians (Herodotus 3, 15, 9), and later it was used by the Romans.

According to the Torah, this type of death was God's damnation (Dt. 21:23; Gal. 3:13), and so, it was a shameful death. For the Jews, Jesus had been abandoned and accursed by God. He had been crucified.

The cross of Jesus is meaningless without the Christ. Jesus' cross is just another cross that was raised up by the Romans to kill a rebel, or one accused of rebellion. The cross of Golgotha becomes the Christian symbol only after

the resurrection, because the resurrection of Jesus shows the praxis of God. Then and only then the cross takes a new, different, and valid meaning.

The life of Jesus the Christ was a total giving of himself for the "Other". It was a total fulfillment of the mission that his Father gave him. His suffering and his experience of despair were the suffering and the despair of the poor, as well as the suffering and the despair of God. (67)

Even to the end of the cross God showed that the shameful death for the benefit of the poor was more valid than all the kingdoms of the earth. God did not glorify Jesus with the resurrection. The glorification of Jesus started with the cross, and the poor see in the cross the actual strength and the beginning of liberation as well as the love of God for the poor, not because they are good, but because they are poor. (68)

Christ died for the revolutionary ideas that meant liberation for those oppressed by the circle of the Empire and the servile Jewish supporters and followers, those who rejected God with their actions and their oppression of the poor, and sought egotistic social positions and benefits.

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(67) Juergen Moltmann, The Crucified God (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 203.

(68) Gutierrez, La Fuerza, p. 206.

The cross is not only a religious symbol for the poor Christian, for they see in it the hope of their liberation: political, economic, social, as well as their liberation from sin. It is in this spirit that the "Documentos de Consultas a la Conferencia Episcopales", stated:

The Gospel urges us to contribute in the creation of an economic and political order in which justice and freedom will rule and where the poor can be an authentic protagonist." (D.C. 711)

For the Jews Jesus was degraded and abandoned by God when he was crucified, but in the suffering of Jesus was God's suffering. God's glory does not shine in the crowns of kings or presidential palaces, nor on the rich. It shines on the outcast, the poor.

His authority is not with those in high political positions; it rests on a cross with a subversive poor man, crucified between two other revolutionaries. His hope was not in Rome, it was in an occupied country, outside the city, in the slums with the poor, for it is the poor who will listen and follow Jesus. The rich and the capitalists always will try to overpower the Liberator and turn him over to the powers of the Empire for his crucifixion.

If he only stops bringing good news to the poor, if Christ had stop preaching about loving my neighbor as I love myself. For the oppressors all of these demand a political death, the God-child-Chirst is a dangerous person advocating even unto death, a New World, and a New Heaven who calls for justice for the poor.

## C H A P T E R   I V

### POVERTY, INJUSTICE AND REBELLION

Si se toma en cuenta que la religión cristiana fue en los primeros tiempos la religión de los pobres, que fue en la época del Imperio Romano la religión de los esclavos, porque se basaba en preceptos profundamente humanos, no hay duda que el movimiento revolucionario ganaría mucho...a medida que los dirigentes de la iglesia Católica y otras iglesias vuelvan al espíritu Cristiano de la época de los esclavos de Roma. Y digo, no solo ganaría el socialismo y el comunismo, ganaría también el Cristianismo.

(Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz. Speech at Ciego de Avila in commemoration of the take-over of the Moncada military post. July 26, 1980)

Poverty is a state of human and social condition that evolves; it does not have a static condition. The amount of poverty and suffering of the poor has increased. The exploitation, deprivation and the oppression has become the pattern of life of two thirds of the world's population, those who cannot be called just or merely poor anymore, but paupers.

The new and suffering poor, the paupers, live to be illiterates, to be exploited by others. Yet they do not realize that they are being exploited and oppressed, and they die the slow death of hunger and desperation. To be the "Keepers of the poor" is a sin, just as it is a sin to put the bondage of pauperism on the daughters and sons of God.

#### A. Institutionalized Poverty

"For you always have the poor, but you will not always have me." (Matt. 26:10; Mk. 14:7; John 12:7)

Jesus spoke these words while a woman anointed him at Bethany. According to John, this woman was Mary, Lazarus' sister, and it was Judas Iscariot, who complained about not using the money spent on perfume to help the poor. In interpreting this passage our tendency is to look at the preceding verse:

He [Judas] said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contributions.

It is easy to see why Judas complained. After all,



sinful Judas was a thief. One should not fail to understand the message of Jesus which is a defiant challenge to all of those who call themselves children of Israel and of God, and to their responsibility towards the poor.

In Deuteronomy, while dealing with the concept of the Sabbath Year, God, the Lord said:

Let there be no poor among you then. For Yahweh will bless you in the land Yahweh your God gives you...only if you pay careful attention to the voice of Yahweh your God keeping and observing all these commandments that I enjoin on you today. (Deut. 15:4-5 J.B.)

God demands and commands: "Let there be no poor...", and Jesus knew this saying, but he also knew that the justice and righteousness of the Kingdom of God was pushed aside, tramped, and destroyed by the rich and powerful. The result was that we "always have the poor with us", and the absence of Jesus. It is important to read Jesus' statement once more so as to notice that he puts "me" as opposite to "poor" therefore, to have the poor means the absence or to have not the presence of the body of Jesus. (1) As a contrast, in the Deuteronomic passage, the absence of the poor: "Let there be no poor", means the presence of God and his blessing.

This saying was not a prophetic one. Jesus' saying reflects the reality of a humanity far from God. The egotism and the ambition for power that people has brings poverty to others.

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(1) Fernando Belo, A Materialistic Reading of the Gospel of Mark (New York:Orbis, 1981), p. 205-06.

Poverty is an expression of sin, that is, of a negation of love. It is therefore incompatible with the coming of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of love and justice. (2)

Jesus repudiated poverty with the same concept, and his saying "For you always have the poor with you" was and is a slap in the face to those who oppress or who do not love and work with and for the liberation of the poor.

In our days Jesus will repudiate those who claim the elimination of the poor by giving charity, or in our days, through a simplistic industrialization programs in societies. (3) A true interpretation of the scriptures would force one to admit that it is the system based on capitalism that keeps and makes the poor.

1. The System of Oppression - Capitalism. The political and economic structures of the Western world work in unity in order to produce a system that is geared to favor those who have the power and to oppress and destroy those who oppose it.

Present societies, specially those considered developed societies - from where the transnational corporations spring up to squeeze the entire world - do not

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(2) Gustavo Gutierrez, Teología de la liberación (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1971), p. 228.

(3) Here we refer to the trickle down economic theory which was imposed with disastrous results in several countries in Latin America during the 60s and 70s. The policy stated that when economic benefits are given to the rich and wealthy the expectation is that their business transactions will result in some benefit for the poor.

know God. These societies are too far from the God of justice and righteousness. Like in the days of Jesus, the present circle of power: Government, business people, politicians and the Judicial system works for one purpose only - for the enrichment and the strenghtening of the system through the constant annual accumulation of more wealth at the corporate level. (4)

The entire system has become more sophisticated, and the power of the transnational corporations affects and plays with the lives of nations. George Ball stated:

Corporations that buy, sell, and produce abroad do have the power to affect the lives of people and nations in manner that necessarily challenges the prerogatives and responsibilities of political authority. How can a national government make an economic plan with any confidence if a board of directors meeting 5,000 miles away can by altering its pattern of purchasing and production affect in a major way the country's economic life? (5)

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(4) Rubem Alves, Tomorrow's Child (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). In his first Chapter: The Organization of the Absurd, Alves compares the systems to dinosaurs. It is the desire for power and the insatiable demand for growth of the corporations that make them turn into such animals, who eventually could not adapt to necessary changes due to the clumsiness of their size and the result was their death and disappearance. The dinosaur complex also affects governments and societies, where love and obsession for power become the only god. Alves writes: "A healthy economy is a growing economy. Whether this growth results from sales of cigarettes - of weapons, roses or Bibles - is totally irrelevant. The important issue is not how the profit is made, but rather how much profit is made." He continues: "War, the selling of weapons, and the production of napalm are excellent investments. The death market is inexhaustible. Slave labor and apartheid are also good investment. They produce cheap labor, and this is good for the economy. But peace and justice are bad investments...The prophets denounce the connection between the healthy economy and death." (p. 3-4)

(5) Ball is cited in Robert Hailbroner, The Multination-

The rich and the powerful in their inhuman and ungodly ways not only control the economic life of the people, but also the political. They have control over the lives and destinies of those who dare to resist or change the system that oppresses the poor.

A review of the cases of the United Fruit Company which deposed Arbenz in Guatemala (6), and IT&T, in collusion with the CIA, brought down the Allende government in Chile and murdered the president (7). This clearly shows how the rich and powerful without any respect for human life can and will dislocate national economics, upset world currency flows (8), and buy and sell people for "a pair of sandals".

The root of institutionalized poverty is not an economic or a social one in nature, rather it is a question of justice and righteousness.

Justice, righteousness, peace, freedom, and love are words that have been manipulated by the rich and powerful in

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nal Corporation and the National State (New York:New York Review Books, 1971)

(6) For more information see Richard H. Immerman, The CIA in Guatemala (Texas:University of Texas Press, 1982)

(7) Also see F. Sergueiev, Chile el gran negocio y la CIA (Moscow:Editorial Progreso, 1980), and Susana Bruna, Chile:La legalidad vencida (Mexico:Serie Popular Era, 1976)

(8) Richard J. Barnt & Ronald E. Muller, Global Reach (New York:Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 23 Corporate managers have the power to shift capital, develop or hold technology and technological information, even the power of molding public opinion and desires of the population. This power is uncontrolled and not challenge by governments of poor nations.

order to justify their sinful egotism and also to make it appear that God is on their side. But this is a negation of God, since they build a society upon the spoils and the exploitation of the masses. (9) This exploitation is a sin. The poverty that is programmed and carried out consciously by the rich and powerful makes themselves richer and more powerful, while the poor become paupers who are looked down upon as part of the production line, part of the property and a material asset of the corporations.

The erroneous belief that transnational corporations help the economy of the poor nations has created a dangerous and hypocritical sense of paternalism, while the reality is the exploitation and the drainage of the economy of the poor nations. Since 1960, the Caterpillar corporation has sent to its headquarters in the United States 4.2 Billion dollars in net earnings. It is interesting to notice that the principal centers of operation for that corporation are in Panama, Mexico, and Brazil. (10)

Cargill, the largest exporter of grains from the United States, has received more than 1 billion dollars in business from poor nations. (11) Johnson and Johnson between the years of 1965-75 invested 0.7 million, while its total

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(9) Gustavo Gutierrez, "A violencia de un sistema", in A Economia Internacional: Na visao da moral Crista (Petropolis:Editora Vozes, 1980), p. 127.

(10) Helder Camera, Cristianismo, Socialismo, Capitalismo (Salamanca:Sigüeme, 1974) p. 37.

(11) Ibid.

returns to its headquarters was 22.7 million dollars. (12)

Like these, most of the transnational corporations use the national resources as well as the national economies to exploit and become richer.

The result of this exploitation and institutionalized poverty is the negation of human rights and the right to life for the majority of the masses in the Third World. It is in this arena that the economic and social fight has to be fought for the liberation and the construction of a just society, where the love of God and his justice can show his kingdom.

Politics, economics - which can be translated into justice and righteousness - have to be confronted by the Church, realizing that concientization means to deal with them from a perspective defined by our identification and solidarity with the poor, or a perspective from the bottom of the problem. It is necessary to deal with the causes rather than with the appearances. That is why in Medellín, as in Puebla, poverty was denounced as the result of the present social order, of the socio-economic order, where the wealth achieved by a few comes from the sweat, blood, pains, and cries of the majority. The exploitation of the poor by a few. (13)

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(12) Quoted by Esther and Mortimer Arias, The Cry of My People (New York: Friendship Press, 1980), p. 55.

(13) Eagleson and Scharper, Puebla n. 1209.

In a weekly meeting of biblical study and reflection in a barrio parish in Lima, Perú, a woman said: "Since I have lived long enough, I am preparing myself for death; we the old are close to death". To this a young woman replied: "No grandma, that was before. Now it is the children that are closer to death." (14)

This dialogue is the reality caused by the exploitation of the masses. How can a Christian society worship and pray to God, while they place higher values on the profit of a corporation over the life of God's children?

In the Christian faith even sin has been spiritualized, forgetting that sin is also committed by performing or supporting the oppressive structures of society. To do nothing for the poor is a sin. One is either for the kingdom of life and justice, or against it and God's Son, as shown by a lust for power and wealth and the hoarding of material possessions in a social system that disseminates death in all its cruelty and perversity. (15)

God and the poor are united. The gospel of Matthew offers the kingdom to the poor (5:3), and this promise given by Jesus the Christ at the Sermon of the Mount, is expressed in concrete activities in Chapter 25, activities which break the complex of the egotistic power and bring the kingdom

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(14) This dialogue appeared in "Danos nuestro pan de cada día", Paginas, Lima, diciembre 1979.

(15) "A Violencia...", p. 130.

closer.

2. Jesus: Productivity and Distribution. There is a passage in the Gospel that is repeated more than any other passage. The miracle of the feeding of the multitudes appears twice in Matthew (14:13-21 and 15:29-38, twice in Mark (6:30-44 and 8:1-10), once in Luke (9:10-12), and once in John (6:1-14).

It is unusual to think of this passage as one dealing with a model of production, distribution and satisfaction, (16) but the bread and the fish can show us what constitutes Jesus' miracle.

Regardless of which passage is chosen, we have to agree that Jesus had a problem of production and distribution - he only had 5 or 7 breads depending on the Gospel and 2 or a "few" fish, but considering the multitude, Andrew's question was valid: "What are they among so many?" (John 6:9) Production was only one of the problems; the other was how to distribute them to 4 or 5 thousands people. Finally, was fish and bread enough to satisfy the crowd?

Here is a demonstration of real compassion by Jesus toward a human need; one that stands in contrast to the impotent perplexity of the disciples. In Mark 6 we can see how Jesus showed his compassion for the multitude, "because

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(16) CEDI, "Pan de Vida", Imágenes de Vida (Rio de Janeiro: CEDI, 1982), p. 33.



they were like sheep without a shepherd". Jesus ordered the people to sit in groups for an easy head count, gave thanks to God, and broke the bread - following the normal Jewish tradition for a meal.

The amazing thing is that this miracle did not take place when Jesus gave thanks to God, blessed the bread, or broke it. The real miracle took place only when these elements were distributed or passed to those who were hungry, when it was shared in the community, with those for whom Jesus had compassion. It is enlightening to compare this to the temptation of Jesus (Mtt. 4:3; Lk. 4:3), where Satan tells Jesus to produce bread out of the stones. To this command Jesus refuses, not only because it came from Satan, but also because such production was going to represent a sinful production since distribution and consumption were not part of it. That type of productivity called hoarding is a sin.

Basil the Great, is one of the same opinion:

When someone steals a man's clothes we call him a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked man and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging unused in your closet belong to the man who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belongs to the man who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor. (17)

The production of Jesus was production to help

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(17) As quoted by José Miranda, Marx and the Bible (New York:Orbis, 1974), p. 16.

those in need, a production that was not wasted: "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost." (John 6:12). Also, all the Gospels indicate that satisfaction was achieved. In other words, the miracle of production, distribution and satisfaction was not a plan of the marketing department or a decision of the board of a corporation in order to hoard money or power. The miracle of Jesus' production was to supply a current need in time and space.

The production institutions in their unsatiable greed for wealth and power create poverty, forgetting that early socio-economic Christian principles were communal.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.  
(Acts 2:44-45)

## B. Institutionalized Violence

Poverty is the result of systems that do not know God; for if the body of Jesus (the one who brings unity) is not there, and the result is injustice. The poor suffers; the poor hunger; the poor die; the rich and the powerful say that it is God's will

The rich man in his castle  
The poor man at his gate.  
God made, high and lowly,  
And order'd their state.

(Hymn Ancient and Modern)

Before Adam Smith and the rise of capitalism, the

feudal society was based on power that emanated from the possession of land, cattle and armies. It is later with the development of capitalism that the balance of power was taken by the industry. On the early system there was a limit to the power, this limit was determined geographically; now with capitalism - the limit was lifted and not barriers are set upon it. The power of money controls even the lives of people and nations.

The poor unite; the poor raise their voices in solidarity, claiming their rights. That "insolence" or that act of "subversion", has to be stopped by the rich and their supporters. Society blames the poor for being poor, but when they try to improve their salary, their way of life, they are seen as a threat to society, to the violent society that in its human violence denigrates labor, denies a fulfillment of life to the poor, and robs the children of their youth.

The product that the industrialized society produces becomes the first concern. In this creation of productivity it is the human act that has become secondary in the "miracle" of production and distribution. This sequence of priorities took place when capitalism was adopted and blessed by the Church creating a situation that is anti-God and anti-Christiam, where the worker has to sell his knowledge and labor to a person or corporation. Work is understood as a commodity and is treated as such. This concept is the "negation of the priority of the person in the process of

labor." (18) It is also the negation of fidelity toward Christ.

The Enciclit Laboren Exercens states:

And there are poor of many kinds; they appear in different places and circumstances; they appear in many ways as the result of violence to the dignity of human labor, because of the limitations and impossibilities for work - that is, the plague of unemployment - or the rejection from certain jobs and the rights that flow from them, especially the right to a just salary, job security for the workers and the families. (8.6) (19)

We see the reference to the exploitation and underpayment of the worker, those who have been forced by the capitalist system to sell their bodies and souls in order to survive. This unilateral transaction strengthens the power and the wealth of their oppressors whose end is more productivity and a ceaseless effort to develop ways to "motivate" their workers to produce more at less cost.

The term violence has broader application than is normally thought. For most people, violence indicates a physical attack with the intention to hurt or to cause damage to a person or property, but violence is committed by denying people the basic right to life, food, work, and self-improvement. It is a "sophisticated" but more damaging type of violence. This situation is a condition of injustice that is maintained by the system in order to support the status

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(18) Rolando Ames, "El trabajo y el hombre", in Sobre el trabajo humano (Lima:CEP, 1982), p. 82.

(19) As it appears in Gustavo Gutierrez, "El evangelio del trabajo", Sobre el trabajo humano, p. 51.

quo. This is Violence 1, as Elder Camera calls it.

When this type of violence becomes unbearable by the people, they find the necessity to repel the systematic violence to which they are submitted. This response to the first violence is called Violence 2. Sometimes the people act in a disorganized way in confronting the armed forces or police during demonstrations. Other times they get organized and offer organized violence to the institutionalized violence. Such persons are called guerrillas, and they become a popular movement, and can exist only by having a large support of the local population. This second type of violence is the one that the status quo rejects and opposes by claiming that the government condemns violence of the popular movements as subversive, since they disrupt "order and peace". This propagandistic language gives them their own reason for investigations (repression and torture), and taking measures to bring "order" and "peace" (martial law, street military patrols, massive detentions, and disappearances).

And so the spiral of violence keeps going in ascendancy; increasing the repressive measurements and activities of the status quo when the guerrillas respond to an increase of Violence No. 1. The system tries to stop Violence No. 2, but the only way to stop the spiral of violence is to go deep into the root of the problem: Stop Violence No. 1, the violence created by the system - institutionalized violence.

It is necessary to stop and analyze the cause of the violence that is taking place, specially when we are dealing with the second type of violence, or the one that comes from popular movement. It is wrong to judge the kind of violence used by the oppressed when trying to stop the first violence imposed by the oppressor? When it is stated that violence is not Christian, which violence is being referred to? (20)

1. The Manipulation of Violence by the Oppresor. Paulo Freire makes an interesting statement:

When the oppressed person dares to rebel against the oppressors, he is called violent, barbaric, inhuman. Among its privileges the oppressor reserves for himself the right of how to define violence, how to identify it, and when to call it. (21)

It is clear that the oppressor at the same time that he is violent and provokes the violence of the poor, also controls and manipulates the concepts and causes of the violence by misleading and lying to the people. (22)

This is accomplished by controlling and manipulating the press, radio and television, and thus creating a favorable public opinion toward the institutionalized violence, but an adverse opinion toward the revolutionary violence.

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(20) Luis Olmedo Requena, Fé Cristiana y violencia revolucionaria (Buenos Aires: Tierra Nueva, 1981), p. 9.

(21) Paulo Freire, Educacao como practica da liberdade (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra, 1969) Note 3, Chptr. III.

(22) Olmedo Requena, p. 11.

In order to do this, the oppressor presents himself as the defender of democracy and religious values, dismembering and negating the revolutionary violence from its political, social and economic context and deforming its moral values.

No government admits that violence exists in its nation; therefore, it is necessary to create a fable in order to justify their actions. It is said that the revolution is imported by communist nations whose end is to control the world and to destroy our Christian world.

If anyone dares to speak out, to protest, then of course that is subversion and communism. (23)

It does not take a communist to tell the people of the Third World that they are poor, that they are exploited and oppressed by the rich, the powerful and the transnational corporations.

When the poor tired of their suffering and of finding no way out of their misery, and no future for their children through a democratic way, the poor unites in order to stop the violence of the system. The result is the arm struggle - the guerrilla movement. Now the possibility of dialogue and changes has been destroyed. The guerrilla takes a definite position, since they have not been given other alternative: No reforms, but revolution.

The struggle is for a new system, and eventually, for the population that has remained uncommitted to either side,

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(23) Gladys Weigner and Bernhard Moosbrugger, A Voice of Third World, (New York:Paulist Press, 1972), p. 79.

and due to the repressive acts of the government military forces the situation turns to be clear cut:

1. Government - repressive and symbol of tortures, exploitation, suffering and death.

2. Guerrilleros - hope in their struggle.

Even though the guerrillas are not perfect political systems or "good guys", it has to be agreed that their movements are popular ones. It relates and understand the poor. This explains the existence of these popular movements, their presence means that the majority of the common people sees them as "good guys" and support them.

In order to try to win the psychological war, the government, through the news media presents the guerrillero as a violent, terrorist, sanguinary person, looking for the opportunity to grab power in order to impose a dictatorship. The radio, press and television tell us that the "agents of the keepers of order" (the government forces), are trying to keep the peace and maintain the national sovereignty and their repressive methods are legitimate and necessary in order to maintain "democracy". Naturally the word "violence" is never attached to their military violent activities.

There is an appeal to the morals and ethics of the nation, without presenting the reality and the origin of the violence. So, violence is treated, by the oppressor, simply as an ethical and moral issue without considering its source or the historical influence.



This argument is not to deal with the concept of the just war or violence, a theme first argued by St. Augustine. This is impossible since violence is not an option or a result of a personal decision; it is a reality in the life of the poor and oppressed, and it is part of the ruling and powerful class. Violence is forced upon the poor since peace and love do not exist.

Jales Costa, a Brazilian sociologist says:

I do not opt for violence, it is forced upon me. I have no other choice. If I opt for nonviolence I am the accomplice of oppression, I take sides on behalf of the violence of the state....The Christian temptation is to have faith in a naive and ineffective nonviolence (IDOS International, May 1969) p. 64 (24)

Looking at this concrete situation; the questions facing us are: Does the Christian faith call me to desire peace or to create and bring it upon all people? As Christians, should I take up a non-violent attitude, becoming a collaborator in the injustice and the violence of the oppressor against my sisters and brothers?

This and other questions have been debated by Christians and the Church for centuries. Camilo Torres, the Colombian priest who made many pacifist attempts to correct society, decided to take up arms to attempt to remove the oppressive system and make his love a reality for his brothers and sisters.

He did not choose the violent way out of social

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(24) As quoted by Robert McAfee Brown, Religion and Violence (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), p. 57.

resentment or hate, but out of love. That was the only path left to him by the violent system and the oppressor. These are his words:

I opted for Christianity because I considered it the best way to serve my neighbors. Christ called me to the priesthood and I was motivated to give myself completely to love others. As a sociologist I always wanted this love to become effective through science and technology. When I analyzed the Colombian society, a revolution became necessary to bring food to the hungry, to give drink to those who thirst, to dress the naked, to make a reality the well being of our people. I will say that the revolutionary fight is a Christian and priestly fight. It is only through this fight, under the concrete reality of our nation, that we can make a reality of the love that men have for their brothers. (25)

2. The Rich are Violent. The Christian religion evolved and took place in society. Part of the infrastructure of every society is its mode of production, which is the relation of the population to its material resources for the production of goods that the society needs for its survival, satisfaction, and its existence. The organization or system of production and reproduction is called mode of production which varies according to the national resource available in the society.

The various modes of production can be grouped under two categories: communitarian and asymmetric. The communitarian mode is one in which all members of a society

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(25) As quoted by Olmedo Requena, p. 29-30

enjoy equally the result of their production (26), [there does not exist private property]. The distribution of the labor power is equated with the productive work - without privileges or exceptions beyond those set by the physical limitations of the individuals. This system also distributes the finish products according to the need of each person.

That is what we find in 2nd Corinthians:

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what he has, not according to what he has not. I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply our want, that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack."  
(2 Cor. 8:12-15)

We see a communitarian mode, the Christians from Corinth were advised by Paul to share their labor power with the Jerusalem community that was poor.

On the other hand, is the asymmetric mode of production where a minority controls the means of production. In this mode the work force is distributed unequally; the same is true of the finished product. This disparity creates a difference in classes. A minority that controls the capital, resources, and exploits the labor power. The majority are the laborers who do not even control the price of their labor. This creates a tension of classes be-

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(26) Otto Maduro, Religion and Social Conflicts (New York:Orbis, 1981), p. 47-48.

cause of opposite objectives and interests.

In this society a certain minority gradually increases their power by controlling the means of production and society. It also controls the distribution of labor, where the majority of the labor force ends up producing not for their needs, but according to the criteria of the minority. This minority also ends up controlling the distribution of the production, amassing a large quantity of power in the hands of a few. The fate of the majority is that they become more and more under the oppressive control of the minority.

Whenever an asymmetric society exists, it has developed on a religious base which fosters the system and develops concepts that justify their way of living. This concept was used by Constantine in his intent to give a unifying concept to a decaying Roman Empire. Through the centuries religion has been used to justify the violent oppression by the rich over the poor.

In this sense, Marx was absolutely correct when he said:

"Religion is the opium of the people."

In order to maintain their position of privilege, the rich have used all the forces that the state puts at their command, not only the armed forces, but also the educational system, radio, press and television.

The manager for the Bank of America in Guatemala, Keith Parker stated:

What they should do is declare martial law. There you catch somebody: they go to a military court. The colonels are sitting there; you're guilty, you're shot. It works very well. (27)

They, the rich creates a new and alienating fantasy, where the poor are made to believe that the rich and the powerful are the only ones who can save or better then, and that the "generosity" or "alms giving" of the rich is the real expression of a Christian faith.

This mode of operation was defended by the Church, which also reaped benefits from the oppression of the poor. This Church kept the masses submissive and passive, and even the violence of the rich was described as the "goodness and blessing" of the rich.

Why will the rich be so violent? It is the fear of losing their power and the fear of the power the poor might acquire. Tolstoy expressed this thought:

The proprietors and the capitalists, knowing the sentiments they inspire in the workers, distrust them, fear them, and seek to keep them in submission by the organized force of government. Thus it is that the situation of the worker becomes steadily worse and their dependence upon the rich grows; while the wealth of the rich, their power over the workers, their fear and their hate, continues to increase. (28)

This fear and hate become visible when the poor become conscious of their reality. If the Marxian ideas take root it is because the rich fear the poor and the

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(27) Tom Barry, Beth Wood, Deb Preusch, Dollars & Dictators: A Guide to Central America (Albuquerque:Resource Center, 1982), p. 59.

(28) Leo Tolstoy, The Law of Love and the Law of the Violence (New York:Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970)

oppressed. Nothing could be more satisfying for the rich than to maintain the status quo of the society, politics and economic of a nation.

The conclusion is that the conflict of classes was not invented or created by Marx or Hegel. This conflict was created by the peoples' own separation or alienation from God and neighbors. The result was capitalism in which money and production become their god. Marx applied materialism to his political-philosophical analysis, but capitalism lives and strives on pure materialism, even people are seen as a means to create more capital. People become the human sacrifice to their inhuman god.

A new situation develops when the Church of the Third World raises the voice for the poor and by its annunciation of the kingdom of God denounces the oppressor. This in turn causes the rich to use maximum repressive forces, the violence that only shows their fear and their hatred of the poor and the Church. They falsely claim their violence is justified by the "threat of Communism. The reality is the expression of their fear for the change of their oppressive and violent system.

3. The National Security State . The doctrine of National Security was adopted from Nazi Germany and utilized by France against Alger's war of Independence. The United States adopted this doctrine during the Cold War, and this ideology was implanted in the Latin America military which

attended the School of the Americas at Panama.

The doctrine of National Security is a military doctrine; it is a tactic of total war in which politics plays an important role. The main enemy is any ideology that opposes "democratic capitalism". This ideology operating in Latin America became a second shield of security for the United States.

The military regimes from Latin America give the priority to politics. Some say, in a humorous way, this is Hegel's revenge against Marx. (29)

It will be difficult to understand this doctrine outside the context of a total war concept: cold war and nuclear war. In this doctrine all distinctions between violence and non-violence are eradicated. Security is the right of survival by the State against its adversaries, by which ever means it is achieved, violently or not; the means are unimportant.

In the international realm this means that the border between diplomacy and military power is destroyed. The result is that anything is permitted in achieving national security - violence, economic extortion, psychological warfare, undeclared wars, and any other means at hand. (30)

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(29) Jose Comblin, "La doctrina de la Seguridad Nacional" in Vicaría de la Solidaridad, Dos ensayos sobre seguridad nacional (Santiago: Vicaría de la Solidaridad, 1979), p. 56.

(30) One can see all of the national security weapons being utilized by the United States against Nicaragua, trying

The nation becomes the supreme entity and any thing is permissible for its "security"; people become secondary and are only a means to achieve this national security.

This total war is even taken into the religious arena. Proposition 2 of the Santa Fe document (prepared for President Reagan, as his political delineation for his presidential term) accuses the Church of manipulation through the news media the subject of human rights, "which has played an important role in bringing down authoritarian governments, but pro-Americans, replacing them with anti-Americans dictatorships, communists or procommunist." (31)

Proposition 3 calls for:

The international policy of the United States should begin to confront (and not only react at a later time) the Theology of Liberation, as it is utilized in Latin America by the clergy of the "liberation theology" (32)

Further in Proposition 5 the Santa Fe Document deals with human rights:

Human rights - a cultural and political concept...affects peace negatively, as well as the stability and the se-

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to destroy that nation. The same tactics were applied to Chile and the democratic government of president Allende. The sudden price drop of copper, Chile's main export, in the world market; the denial of selling cars and industrial repair parts, in order to stop the mining industry. President Nixon imparted a personal order to the CIA Director: "Stop all aid, not even a screw should get to Santiago, we will make the economy screech." Sergueiev, p. 25

(31) Mimeograph copy, "Una nueva politica interamericana para los años 80" Document prepared for President Ronald Reagan when he was a presidential candidate, by the Santa Fe Committee in May of 1980

(32) Ibid.



curity of the region. It should be abandoned and replaced by a policy of no intervention and of a political and ethical realism. (33)

How are Christians suppose to respond and act? The answer has to be analyzed from Romans 13, where Paul writes to the Corinthians about being subject to the governing authorities. Verse 4 reads:

For he [the government] is God's servant for your good. for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer.

When a government places national security above God's creation [people], then that government and its people are not God's servants for the good of the people.

Christians should not obey such a government, but they have the right and duty to oppose it, because this is idolatry. God the Redeemer and Liberator has been replaced with god, the state, which tries to use and manipulate people for its own purpose by imprisoning and using God.

In order to fight against the Church, the Latin American ragimes of the national security, supported and guided by the United States and its centers of intelligence had elaborate diverse strategies to terrorize the church and the people. The Rockefeller report in 1969 informed the government of Washington:

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(33) Ibid.

If the Latin American church fulfills all the agreements from Medellin, the interests of the United States are in danger. (34)

The implementation of one of those tactics can be seen in the text that was distributed a few years ago in the Intelligence Section of the Second Army of Bolivia, with Headquarters in the Oruro province:

1. The Church should not be attacked as an institution. The same shall be of the Bishops. Only the liberal part of the Church should be attacked...
2. We shall attack especially the foreign priests...It should be pointed out that they teach with insistence the concept of arms struggle, and they are connected to international communism...
3. The CIA has decided to get involved directly in this struggle. They have promised to give all the information on some of the priests (personal, their studies, friends, addresses, publications and contacts out of their country)...
4. Surveillance of some of the religious houses...
5. When possible we shall not intervene in religious house, this generates negative public opinion.
6. Arrests will be done, especially in the countryside, on lonely streets and late at night. Once the arrest of a priest has been done, the Ministry will try to introduce into his personal files - and if possible in his house, subversive propaganda and some weapon - preferably a pistol of large caliber. His dossier shall be ready to be presented to his Bishop and to the press.
7. Good relations shall be maintained with some of the Bishops, and some national priests, in this way the public opinion will not think that a systematic persecution is being done on the Church.
8. It has been promised to give some retributions to the agents working on these cases. The retributions will be

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(34) Manuel Useros (ed.) La vida por el pueblo (Madrid: Editorial Popular, 1981), p. 17.

taken from the articles confiscated from some of the religious people. (35)

With the coming of national security the time of martyrdom of the Church had arrived. The Church had decided to choose the side of the poor.

C. To Know God is to be Just

In the first letter of John is written:

If you know that He is righteous, you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him. (John 2:29)

It is very clear that this demonstrates the praxis of Jesus. At the same time it also denounces the people of this world and contemporary societies. Jeremiah also speaks of what it is to know God (22:13-16): to do justice is to know God.

Isaiah in Chapter 59 deals with a passage that cannot be overlooked if one is trying to understand how to be just - with God's justice - in the mist of injustices, repression, torture, hunger and death.

When I come to OB (Operacion Bandeirantes - Brazilian Military Police) - he said [Captain Albernaz] - I leave my heart at home. I really have respect for the Father [God], but nothing stops me from killing a terrorist... War is war, you either kill or get killed. (36)

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(35) Ibid., p. 18-19.

(36) Frei Tito de Alencar Lima, "La pasion segun Frei Tito" La vida por el pueblo, p. 28. Frei Tito was a Dominican seminarian apprehended in 1969. He was tortured savagely by the Brazilian military. He was exchanged with other prisoners for the Swedish Ambassador that was kid-

God is a God of salvation who hears (v. 1) the cry of the people, but the iniquities have alienated people from God (v.2) "I leave my heart at home.", they have their hands defiled with blood and iniquity, their lips speak lies, and their tongues mutters wickedness (v.3) "I really have respect for the Father". No justice, no sincerity or trust exists in them, they develop wicked deeds of violence, they are prone to evil doings and they shed innocent blood causing death in their path of destruction (v.4-7) "but nothing stops me from killing a terrorist" They do not know peace, they do not act justly, their ways are crooked, and anyone that enters into that path does not know peace, (v.8) "war is war, you either kill or get killed".

In Latin America justice and righteousness is far from the people. "Justice and righteousness" has been bought for a price by the rich, the powerful, and the transnational merchants. The people look for light, but they only find darkness; they look for brightness, they walk in gloom, "The small farmers from Guatemala and Nicaragua can achieve better returns by producing export crops, such as asparagus, berries, etc, to be sold in the United States. In return they should purchase and import cereals from the United

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napped. Frei Tito lived exiled in Chile until 1973 when he moved to Lyon, France to a convent in Eveux. He suffered great psychological damage during the tortures. Broken by the painful and terrible memories of his years in prison and the sadism of his torturers, he hung himself in August of 1974.

States." (37)

While a country like Nicaragua is trying to find its economical freedom, the injustice and the unrighteousness of one of the oppressors is trying to make them deal by creating a dependent crop to supply the wants of the United States, without considering the needs of the Nicaraguans and Guatemalans. In turn the United States wants to sell cereals on their terms and prices (and it is usually done), to those economically poor countries. Why not encourage and help them to raise cereal rather than asparagus, and berries?

1. A Revolutionary Situation. Not only the theology has gone through changes in Latin America, but more importantly the Documents of Medellín has made a phenomenal impact on the young priests and the laity of the church. The Mensajeros de la Palabra (lay preachers) and the catequistas were making new roads in the poor sections of the large cities and among the country people. The Church had to learn how to deal with itself, to allow its old system to go through a revolution in order to serve better the needy ones or the majority of the people of the Latin countries.

The path to justice is a difficult and a thorny one that divides the Church between those who say "Lord, Lord", and those who seek to do God's justice and righteousness. That is what happened to the churches that confronted their

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(37) Op. cit. to (31)

position in the midst of their reality.

The church had to decide whether to remain comfortable and keep the old allies - the ligarquis, or to opt for the poor. The church had to come to grips with what it meant to become poor, to challenge the old allies, hence to become persecuted and be called revolutionaries, subversives, and communists.

For this re-encounter with the Bible the churches in Latin America as well as the religious and lay people are suffering torture, imprisonment and death.

In order to understand the struggles and transformation that the churches have gone through in its process of finding the poor it is helpful to look at Molineaux's (38) chart.

<u>1st Church</u> <u>(Traditional)</u>	<u>2nd Church</u> <u>(Optimistic)</u>	<u>Present Church</u> <u>(Hopeful)</u>
Immutable Structure	Democratization	C.E.B.- Popular Church
Dogma	Dialogue	Challenge
Other Wordly	Relevance	Subversive presence
Aloof	Seek place in modern world	Struggle (death and resurrection)
Conquering souls	Dialogue	Reverse mission (being evangelized by the poor)

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(38) Presentation by David Molineaux to a group of Pastors, Seminarians, and Lay people of the Claremont School of Theology during a Seminar of Deep Immersion at Lima, Perú in July of 1980.

Ethical Obedience	Ethic of responsi-	Solidarity with
	bility	the oppressed
Fortress mentality	Christian Unity	Ecumenism of
		social classes
Gospel separation	Gospel of Recon-	Break (taking
	ciliation	sides)
Charity (alms giving)	Development, Re-	Revolution
	form	

Eventhough Molineaux was talking from his Catholic experience, it reflects, maybe in a lesser degree, and it can also be applied to the Protestant churches in Latin America, which are trying to confront the reality of being Christians among the poor.

Before ISAL, Vatican II and Medellín, the Church (both Catholic and Protestant) was like the 1st Church category. There were churches that tried to maintain aloof from the world problems by keeping a separation of the Gospel and the social conditions of the people. Charity was seen as the highest expression of Christian love for those "less fortunate". In order to maintain all of those conditions, a fortress mentality was created, especially in the Catholic church and the church structure was immutable, unchangeable.

With Vatican II the Churches went into a transition period. They modernized their concepts and entered into the 2nd Church, the Church that looked to the future with optimism. Democratization took place; the dogmatic concepts were discussed. The church tried to find its place in the modern world by entering into dialogue with it, and also by

looking for Christian unity.

The Gospel of reconciliation for all humanity was emphasized and charity was dropped. Development became the expression of a Christian way of expressing love.

This Second Church was a Church that in its optimism was trying to please all the world. With experience the working churches of Latin America continued their change according not only to the need to serve the people better, but also as a response to God's command of justice and righteousness.

The Present Church - the Hopeful Church - is the Church that is more present in the Catholic Church and it came out of Medellín. The struggle of the new Church in Latin America, was the result of bringing the Gospel to the poor and oppressed.

The Immutable Structure has given way to the Popular Church, the church of the poor, which is coming to be feared by the rich. The dogmas are more just being discussed, but they are being challenged in an attempt to understand what their meaning is for people now, under present conditions.

When a body is challenging all the old concepts of the status quo, it becomes a subversive presence, and that is the situation of the present church, a church that in its subversive presence is struggling between death - the death of the old concepts - and the resurrection to a new and more abundant life.

The Church that serves the poor is not there only to



"evangelize" or "convert" the poor, but also to learn from them. It has been learned that the Church has to be evangelized by the poor before it can serve them. The Church has not only to work with the poor, but has to become poor. It must learn of the suffering and the anguish of the oppressed, before it can bring the Good News. It must feel what the poor feel and what salvation means to them. It has to be in solidarity with the dispossessed. Only through the poor will the Church be saved: "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of God."

The Gospel of Reconciliation is not enough, there has to be a break. The Church cannot remain passively in the middle and please the oppressed and the oppressor. It has to take sides. The Church cannot allow itself to remain silent in the mist of oppression and injustice in our societies - to remain silent only means to agree and become a silent participant in the suffering and bleeding of the poor by the rich. The Church has taking the only solution given by the Gospel - the side of the poor and the oppressed. By this the Church does not reject the rich, but the Church takes the side of the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God, and even though the Church is not the Kingdom, it has to be the reflection of the reign of God.

Finally, the concept of charity, as well as development has been rejected, for both become only a way of keeping the poor poor. At this time in history there is no way to change and improve the societies of Latin America, if

it is not done by revolution. The pacifist way has been tried - Guatemala and Chile. Both of them were destroyed by evil powers with lies and economic pressures, as well as direct political and military involvement.

It is of utmost importance to keep the memory of our past ever fresh and present. One must remember what our society had to suffer and struggle. In this sense preaching is the enlightenment of the memory. It was for the Hebrews, in the case of the Exodus story, where the salvific act of God become subversive and revolutionary. For Christians the Lord's Supper has to be a subversive act - that of the giving of one's life for the liberation of others.

People forget that seventy years ago, in the United States, children were working twelve hours a day in the mines of Appalachia and in the meat factories of Chicago, where they were loosing fingers and hands and where there was no compensation for accidents or any health insurance. Unions were forbidden, and only the intention to organize a union was a cause to lose one's job, end up in jail, and be called a communist.

This generation has inherited a world conquered with the sweat and blood of others. Memories have become blank, and many people reject and oppose those who try to achieve the same things in their country today.

It is important to discern the will of the Father, and this is done in the midst of those who suffer, by trial and error, by sin and grace. And, it is here that one runs

the risk - the risk of understanding the Gospel better.

When one understands the Gospel better, this same Gospel becomes the scandal and the stumbling block for others who will make accusations that the church is being divided and is getting away from the true Christian religion, by becoming involved in politics and forgetting the mission of the church, that of saving the souls of the people.

Mary was forced to make memory by the angel when she was told that the promise would be fulfilled in her by the Holy Spirit, and this memory became subversive:

He has shown strength with his arm,  
he has scattered the proud [the rich] in the imagination  
of their hearts  
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
and exalted those of low degree; [the poor]  
he has filled the hungry [the poor] with good things,  
and the rich he has sent empty away.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his posterity forever  
(Luke 1:51-55)

Class struggle was not discovered by Marx. It was developed and used by the rich, alienating those who were poor by their oppression. Class struggle exists in the Bible, but our exegetes have been blind to recognize it - as in the passage of the "Magnificat" and many others.

At the end of their struggles, the poor understood, saw, and knew that the only way to break from the shackles of exploitation was to oppose the class that oppressed them.

For God, the prophets, Jesus and the early Church, there was no doubt or question. In the struggle they always

sided with those who were oppressed and suffered.

2. The God Who Chose Sides. God is a God of justice and righteousness. Since these two qualities define him, it is imperative to understand that he does not tolerate injustices and unrighteousness.

Jesus is very clearly against richness, because he knew that no person could worship and serve God and his anti-thesis, Mannon, and that no wealth is accumulated justly. If it is inherited, then someone before the inheritor acted unjustly. All riches are accumulated through the suffering and oppression of others.

In the parable of the rich and Lazarus (Luke 16 :19-31), usually it is understood that the rich was condemned to Hades because he did not give alms to Lazarus, but it reads: "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things.'" It is clear that his punishment was due to the difference in richness. Jesus does not tell us if Lazarus was a good or pious believer or not; all we know is that he was saved, and we have to conclude that his salvation was not because of his goodness, but because he was poor, because he suffered the injustices of the rich.(39) On the other hand the suffering of the rich echoes the woe of Jesus: "But woe to you that are rich, for you have received

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(39) Jose Miranda, Communism in the Bible (New York: Orbis, 1982), p. 24.

your consolation." (Luke 6:24)

The rich are unjust and ungodly towards their neighbors, the poor. While the rich have parties and "feasts sumptuously every day", in extravagant military budgets, the poor of Latin America starve to death. While the rich are "clothed in purple and fine linen", the poor are full of sores received in the mines of Chile, Bolivia and Peru.

Some rich men put together a syndicate and they started The Cerro de Pasco Corporation (40):

The venture needed a more hospitable legal regime in Peru, and this was provided by the 1901 Mining Code. It swept away at a stroke of 350-year-old tradition of state ownership of mineral rights and substituted an imported tradition for the convenience of foreign interests. (41)

This same God of Lazarus is the God that is working in the mines. This is the God of the poor, the God full of sores, the God that is the poor, the one that is persecuted, tortured and killed in Latin America.

The kingdom is offered to the poor. For Jesus the time of the announcement begins in the reality of an historical center, one which initiates a fundamental way of life. The logic of oppression and violence against the poor is reversed. The birth of a new people announces what the

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(40) The syndicate was formed in 1900-1901 by James B. Haggin and J.P. Morgan. The Cerro de Pasco's initial capital was \$10 million. The Corporation latter, when it became a transnational corporation changed its name to The Cerro Corporation.

(41) David G. Becker, The New Bourgeoisie and the Limits of Dependency (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 31.

kingdom in all its plenitude shall be.

Jesus was the bearer of the kingdom. With the Christ a new practice was introduced: God takes sides once more with the poor and the oppressed that are abused by the empire - "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree. [the poor]; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away." (Luke 1: 52-53). This is the beginning of the kingdom and it is the poor and not the rich who moves it forward.(42)

The God of justice is approachable only through faith and a liberating experience to which we cannot set limits. The abundance of our faith does not reside in us, but in what God put in our hearts. To calculate our energies and time is to sin against God's generosity; it is to try to ignore the suffering of humanity. It is impossible to love God and to try to ignore the cry and the suffering of the poor.

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(42) Hugo Echegaray, "Conocer a Dios es practicar la justicia", in Alejandro Cussianovich (ed.) El credo de los pobres (Lima:CEP, 1978), p. 17.

## C H A P T E R   V

### SOLIDARITY WITH JESUS AND THE POOR

Che amigo Jesú...Así en paraguayó suena muy lindo; "ipora iterei". No más te cuento que, viniendo de lo de Ña Ramona, me encontré con un hombre que quería saber si en la iglesia habría clínica de salud el sábado, "Sí", le dije, y también "purahei", culto de cánticos. "A que hora?", me preguntó. Pues "piharemi"; al oscurecerito. Así como se dice, entre claro y oscuro.

Juan Marcos Rivera, "El hombre vino al culto", Cartas a Jesús (Lima:CLAI, 1982), p. 35.

God sent the prophets, who spoke in defense of the poor and against the rich and oppressor. Later Jesus was sent not just to speak on behalf of the oppressed, but also to bring the reality - the kingdom of God, to teach, and to show that Yahweh is a God of the poor.

We can find the solidarity of God with the poor throughout the entire Bible. There is no doubt about this fact. The Gospel points out the solidarity of Jesus with the poor on many occasions.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10).

This statement reflects the same commitment that Jesus expressed when he first initiated his mission by reading the scroll of Isaiah in chapter 61:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.

The epitome of the good news to the poor is to have life to the full here, and this is an approximation of God's Kingdom.

This same concept was given by Jesus with the Beatitude:

Happy are you poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.

Here it could be said that Jesus' statements conclusively praise poverty. This is true, but he does not canonized it. His praise is realistic and well within the frame and concept of the commandment of love. For it is only those who can renounce property who can help those who are in need. The rich persons has their heart in the riches that



posses them.

When Jesus calls for the re-announcement of wealth and property he is calling for an end to individualistic egotism. In this call he is refering to the injustices committed in this personal ethical attitude against the poor and the powerless by persons who they act corruptly trying to accumulate wealth. This is the case of the Pharisees' ethic, who were accused by Jesus to "devour the property of the widows" (Matt. 23:14).

The words addressed to the young rich man (Matt. 19:16-30; Mr. 10:17-31; and Lk. 18-18ff): "sell everything you own and give the money to the poor.", does not entail a solution to a social economic problem. This is not the intention of Jesus; rather he is pinpointing the danger and the injustice of wealth, since all riches are unjust.

The poor are the result of the injustice of the rich, but the poor are not pitied by Jesus. The poor are blessed, and the warning is to the rich: "how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." (Lk. 18:24)

We find that while the Kingdom is promised to the poor, for the rich it is something impossible. This impossibility is stated by Jesus in the metaphor of the camel and the eye of a needle. It is clear that rich persons will not enter the Kingdom, not because they are bad or sinful persons, but only because of their richness and

their attitude which results in alienation from God and neighbor.

God walks with the poor towards his kingdom. The poor follow God because they do not have anything to hold them. They follow only in faith, and they walk in humbleness and faith with the God of the poor.

#### A. Walking with the Poor

God walks with the poor and oppressed. For his promise to those who suffer the egotism of the rich - is his kingdom, not in life thereafter, but now. To enter the kingdom is to be with God and walk with him, to be in his spirit, and to live fully as a true creature empowered to develop the abilities given by the Creator. In this kingdom one can serve God as one's sisters and brothers.

Walking with the poor, does not mean to walk with the oppressed people as a nurse, curing wounds with paternalistic love. Rather it is the community of believers on a pilgrimage of hope based on the word of God, and it is rooted in the Christian practice of the spirituality of the poor. In other words, it grows out of the evangelizing action of the people, from their protest and solidarity in the face of the injustice. They reject the idea of resignation before oppression, or the sacralization of individualism. (1)

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(1) Diego Irarrazaval, "The Rights of the Oppressed People and their Religiosity", LADOC XI:29, (1981) 23.

To walk with the poor is to learn about God, to know of the suffering and the injustices that the poor ones suffer. It means not just to identify with the suffering one, but to become one of them.

To become one of them means to become incarnated into this world, rather than looking at the incarnation as going out of this world and into a heavenly situation. Incarnation takes place on many levels. Incarnation has to take place in race, language, customs, music, and folklore. But the deepest and truest incarnation comes only when people commit themselves to the most profound and most basic reality which is - death. One must be willing to die for the salvation, empowerment and liberation of the poor and oppressed.

The world of the poor, has concrete social and political characteristics, teaches us how, in our incarnation, we must avoid a false universalization which always ends in a connivance with the powerful. (2) The world of the poor teaches us how Christians should love - not with a false pacifism in the midst of suffering and injustices, but to seek peace with justice.

This is the only way for the Christian: to work and live for the poor and the oppressed, those who help us to understand and to see the presence of God among us, those who teach us about hope.

The real hope of the poor is not just a simple

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(2) Oscar A. Romero, "The Political Dimension of Faith in Option for the Poor", LADOC XI:36 (1981) 26.

optimism: "do not worry, at the end you will enjoy happiness." The poor have listened to too many statements of this false hope. Hope is something different; it is believing that the suffering implied in the struggle for the approximation of the Kingdom of God, which is justice and righteousness is salvific in itself and in its process. That is the time when joy can be subversive, the joy of walking with God and the poor.

To walk with the poor is to do our hermeneutical job and to try to understand the will of the God. By the fact that we try to understand, and we call God our savior and liberator means that we become conscious of the historical oppression of the poor, and that we are not, and cannot be strangers to them and their situation.

But this is not enough, the traditional church has done that, and naturally, the alms giving was the pacifier for religious conscious. What it is needed in order to start to walk with the poor is to become in solidarity with their suffering and oppression, taking their side, feeling their suffering, sweating side by side in their daily laboring, and hungering with them. It takes struggling with them for better housing, better pay, better human rights, for justice and liberation in all its meanings. The church should work with the poor in conquering sin which usually comes from political, economic and social oppression, which by its nature becomes the biggest and most dangerous sin - alienation from God and from the "other".

It is only as one enters in the struggles and suffering that one really becomes conscious of the suffering of the poor. It is in this shared suffering that one can share possessions in love. Alms giving has ended; sharing can now occur with sisters and brothers. Sharing is not limited to possessions [which in reality do not belong only to an individual], but when consciousness is raised enough even life itself is shared with those who we have chosen to walk with - the poor.

In our walking with the poor, one learns and receives God's blessing. It is the result of solidarity with them. Therefore, those blessings cannot come in the form of money, bigger houses or better jobs; the blessings come in knowing God, in becoming closer to Him and in seeing the flashes of His kingdom, the kingdom that is "among you" (Lk. 17:21), between us and the "Other". Knowing God is making this "in your midst" smaller, by stopping being Cains and becoming responsible for suffering brothers and sisters - those who are poor and oppressed.

#### B. The Presence and the Eschatology of the Kingdom

It is very clear how John the Baptist and Jesus started their mission: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." This proclamation announced the end of an era and the beginning of a new one that was being initiated by the presence, teaching and actions of Jesus.

This same concept of the kingdom was pronounced when Jesus' disciples requested to learn a prayer from him: "Your kingdom come...". By this request it is indicated that the kingdom is God's and that Jesus was the initiator of presence and reality of God.

Jesus' preaching of the kingdom was a dynamic and concrete reality established by God, where justice and righteousness rules. God's kingdom indicates the "end of one own's will, richness, power, welfare, honour, and other values dictated by our inherited culture." (3) It means to give up entirely to God's will, "Let your will be done."

The concept of the kingdom of God also encompasses the concept of hope and freedom that this kingdom is among us [now] and also as a promise in the eschatological concept [not-yet]. The reign of God is "the presence and the awareness to realize until death and beyond it, that in God we all are brothers and sisters." (4)

Jesus embodies this kingdom, making God's salvific power a reality in bringing down barriers and systems that create division and injustices. Such changes are necessary in order to feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, protect the fatherless and the widow, dress the naked, liberate the pri-

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(3) Jacques Matthey, "Melbourne, Mission in the Eighties", in World Council of Churches, Your Kingdom Come (Geneva: WCC, 1980), p. 3.

(4) Julia Esquivel, "The Crucified Lord: A Latin American perspective", in *ibid.*, p. 59.

soner, dry the tears of the suffering (5) and liberate the people and nations oppressed and exploited by political and economic sin, and to share ourselves with those who need us.

The salvation that is offered in this kingdom is not only a political salvation, it is something more radical because it deals with the present historical salvation, as well as with the transcendental salvation.

On the temporal level, on the approach to the total kingdom, the political salvation is a must, but the transcendental, or the fulfilment of that kingdom is the divine liberation in its totality.

Jesus came to initiate the kingdom that is among us, but he did not consummate it.

There have existed great debates on whether Jesus' preaching of such a kingdom has been eschatological or apocalyptic.

The eschatological concept affirms an eschaton (6), the end, with the realization of God's promise. This end always pronounces prophetic judgement on the established order through the prophets. Eschatology is always prophetic.

This end is marked by God's justice and the good news

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(5) Ibid.

(6) Eschatology comes from the word *eschatos*. In the Septugian this word was translated from the Hebrew *'aheron*, both words mean extreme, last in time or in place, coming after or behind, hindermost.

to those who identify themselves with God's Kingdom. (7)

Gutierrez states that eschatology in the Bible is "the driving force of salvific history radically oriented toward the future. Eschatology is thus not just one more element of Christianity, but the very key to understand the Christian faith." (8)

Eschatology announces the end of the old and the presence of the new era. The old order is experience under oppression and sin. The future or the new era is where the old things will end.

Between these two stages [the old and the new era], there is a joining where the God of history is also the God of the eschatology and the ruler of both. God not only invaded history by bringing the Kingdom in Jesus, but by his coming, the poor were made able to understand and view flashes of the eschatological realm, the invasion of God, which allowed the poor to "invade" on the perception of the not-yet Kingdom.

Eschatology has a positive and optimistic view of history; regardless of the world situation, those conditions can be changed and improved because God is in it. God is in the most profane things of this world; he can intervene,

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(7) Antonio Rodriguez Carmona, "El reino de Dios en el pensamiento de Jesús", Estudios Biblicos, 39:3-4 (1981) 252.

(8) Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (New York:Orbis, 1973), p. 162.



pouring the salvific grace into an unexpected grandiose future.

On the other hand, apocalypticism is a variation of the prophetic eschatology in which its cosmic concepts degrade the prophetic line of the eschaton.

It codifies, materializes, appears as possessor of magic. It even appears as a machine ready to produce rewards or punishments which has been already promised. (9)

All of these do not call for the real conversion of people, but for hanging on to certain ideas and calculated moves in order to receive rewards. According to apocalypticism God has revealed the end of time. He has divided history in periods, and has given people some clues on how to foretell the annihilation of history and the instauration of his Kingdom.

Apocalypticism views history as negative and pessimistic, because, even though God is the maker and creator, this world and history is under the power and control of the evil one, and nothing good can come out of it.

Ladd states that the apocalyptic concept developed from the Persian and Iranian dualism. After the Babylonian exile, when the Hebrews were allowed to return to Palestine, and the Kingdom of God had not become a reality, "history appeared to be so dominated by evil that it could no longer be thought of as the scene of God's Kingdom...History was

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(9) Rodriguez Carmona, p. 253.

doomed. The kingdom would come only by suprahistorical powers breaking into history and inaugurating a transcendental non-earthly order." (10)

It can be stated that the bridge between history and what will come after the end does not exist. It has been broken due to lack of hope and because the future has stopped being open. The doors have been shut and the danger is that religion can become "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. (11)

Jesus was in the line of the prophets. His view of the kingdom was eschatological.

1. The Now of the Kingdom and Society. The Bible presents eschatology as the driving force of salvation history. If one is to understand the Christian faith, one must deal with and understand eschatology. The theme of the kingdom of God is central to the eschatological concept and this can be seen as the golden thread beginning in the Old Testament.

Abraham received the promise, the hope from God. This hope and promise from God came to be fulfilled in history with the Exodus, the liberation from the slavery of

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(10) George Eldon Ladd, The Presence of the Future (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1974), p. 54.

(11) Marx & Engle, On Religion (New York:Schocken Books, 1964), p. 42.

their Egyptian oppressors. It is in this episode of history that God revealed the promise in human reality that was marked by hope.

The eschaton was not only in the realization of that promise of the hope. The eschaton is the force that drives into the future. The past and present are viewed in relation to the future.

In the Exodus event, the eschaton for the Hebrew people could have been the crossing of the Jordan river into the promise land of milk and honey, a new paradise with new laws and a new concept of God. But the end signified the beginning of something new, which presents something that is most interesting in the Old Testament theology:

The promises which have already been realized historically are not invalidated, but continue to be true in a new context and somewhat different form. (12)

It is in the fulfilment of the promise that humanity can fall short of the divine Grace. When Israel crossed the Jordan, it was the end of the promise, but at the same time it was the beginning of their transgressions against God, and at the same time a new hope and a new promise; and so, it was a new beginning.

The eschatological concept remained present. It was the message and the duty of the prophets to remind the people of Abraham, of their eschatological hope and past liberation.

The relationship between history and eschatology is real

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(12) Gutierrez, p. 164

and important. Eschatology also becomes a reality in an historical process. When this hope of reality becomes distorted, the interpretation of the eschaton is changed.

As in the Abrahamic promise and hope, salvation came again in a real historical event. This time liberation was a realization of the new promise. A new era reached its initiation; the Old Era had come to its end, and this meant the beginning of something new. It came through Jesus.

In contrast to Judaism, the New Testament looks not at the future, but rather it places its hope in the past: Christ; and the present: the kingdom of God is among us; and in the future: under the final consummation of the kingdom. This is the essential element that defines in its most characteristic way the neo-testamental eschatology: the New Era has arrived; the curtain is up. The last act has begun. Humanity can enjoy the blessings of the kingdom and can participate in its redemption.

This eschatology is not limited to the "last things" of a distant future, nor it is the last chapter of a theological book. Rather it has to be looked at from the point of the Incarnation, a redeemable encounter offered by God in the concept of his time, which is the New Time in his history.

But his New Era still belongs in the eschaton, into the future. The same God who invades history is still acting in order to bring the final consummation of his kingdom.

In Christianity, the parousia has not taken place, it was waited for as something to come in a few years after the

Christ was lifted into the clouds. This waiting throughout the centuries turned into the development of two realms in which religion and the Church took the position of giving relevance only to the spiritual and to the after-life Kingdom.

The Kingdom preached was the one that will come to be a reality with the awaited parousia, with the coming of the Lord. This caused a rejection of the possibility of a salvific message for the present time and denied power of the Kingdom here now. It separated the church from the world where everything was sinful and the belief prevailed that no Kingdom can be accomplished without the parousia.

There are times that the reality of a society and the experience obtained by suffering leads to a new understanding of God's word, which will lead to changes in the routine, structures, and concepts of the society. All of these is what Jesus included in his call: "to leave everything behind", and to walk the path to a new understanding of the Kingdom.

This path starts here, in the present environment. The commencement of that Kingdom begins with Jesus' words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your sould, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mtt. 22:37-39)

Christianity cannot be separated from the reality of world affairs, otherwise it becomes as sinful as the dictatorships that oppress and torture people. How can people demonstrate that it is walking towards the Kingdom if they

are selling arms to "friendly countries" that are killing brothers and sisters that belong to the kingdom?

A Christian, being convinced that the ideals of love, justice and righteousness are too high for earth, does not promote, but refutes and contradicts the same thoughts and concepts that Jesus was trying to share: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The Kingdom of God only becomes a reality when one accept the will of God. Jesus taught with his prayer pregnant with a theological reality. "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Both statements are united by the same meaning and they cannot be separated. God's will is that his kingdom shall be established, (13) and when people negate or obstruct his will on earth, they are negating God and his kingdom.

Once this reality is maintained, then society cannot escape from the concept of kingdom. It is in society where the kingdom begins and it is in society where the kingdom becomes a symbol of God. Jesus was very conscious of this reality: "Instead, seek his kingdom and these things shall be yours as well." (Lk. 12:31; Mtt. 6:33) He saw the kingdom as working in the transformation of the alienated society from God, which needs to repent from the sin created by the exploitation, the oppression, the tortures, the repression, and the murders for the sake of maintaining power, prestige, and

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(13) Gustavo Gutierrez, El Dios de la vida (Lima: Pontífica Universidad Católica del Perú, 1981), p. 45

"national security" over God's will.

To seek God's kingdom some things are needed:

1. Hope - this only exists when it is known that the possibility of an open future exists for the active and meaningful participation of people within the society.
2. The possibility must exist for development and empowerment of the people in order that they may serve those that are still oppressed by the system and the rich.
3. Solidarity with those that are oppressed is essential. An individualistic or private hope or faith is not an effective historical endeavor, and it is an alienating factor in God's kingdom.

Considering these statements the question has to be presented: Can something be said with respect to the quality of human life - personal and communal - that corresponds to the kingdom, and its dynamic in its relationship with the "other" and society?

Examining the kingdom in society, requires a consideration of Biblical justice, liberation, and righteousness. Biblical justice implies solidarity with those who suffer injustice. Liberation must be in solidarity with those who are suffering the enslavement of the systems that control and determine the lives of people and nations. Righteousness must come to those who are robbed of the possibility to develop and empower themselves to serve God and the "other"

In this process, one system has to be rejected, for in it, it is impossible to obtain the hope for the kingdom:

Capitalism. This system is marked by its monopolistic and oligopolistic (14) international conditions of operation.

This system can never indicate or approach the conditions of life in the kingdom.

Capitalism as a way of life is anti-liberation; it is oppression and enslavery in terms of the kingdom. (15) The capitalist system is anti-kingdom based on its formation and historical reality. Its trends includes accumulation for the few at the expense, suffering, oppression and death of the many. The more capitalism develops itself, the more that it walks away from the kingdom's reality. The more capitalism expands, the more suffering of death and bleeding of the poor of the Third World countries occurs because they are forced to support and maintain the everlasting, and never-satisfying greed for power and wealth of the capitalists.

By looking at the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it can be seen that spiritualization has been poorly understood with the result that Christians forget the human consequence of the eschatological promises and hopes,

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(14) Oligopoly is a type of monopoly in a market with very few sellers, where the sellers are in the position to arrange between them the price of the products. "Each seller knows that he will push the price down if he is not careful.

So each one is very careful... 'Oligopoly' is an important kind of market structure in the world today." from Elbert V. Bowden, Economics: The Science of Common Sense (Cincinnati: South-Western, 1974), p. 537.

(15) Jose Miguez Bonino, "El reino de Dios y la historia: Reflexiones para una discusion del tema" in Renee C. Padilla (ed.) EL Reino de Dios y America Latina (Lima: Casa Bautista, 1975)



and lose the power to transform and liberate the social structures which oppress and crucify the kingdom's people. (16)

The elimination of misery and exploitation is a sign of the coming of the kingdom. It will become a reality, according to the book of Isaiah, when there is happiness and rejoicing among the people because "men shall build houses and live to inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit; they shall not build for others to inhabit nor plant for others to eat...My chosen shall enjoy the fruit of their labor." (65:21-22) (17)

This passage from Isaiah points out that the sign of the kingdom is also manifested by the end of the exploitation of the person by other persons, and this is also the Marxist theory of eschatology: at the end the workers will triumph over their oppressors, the bourgeois, and the workers' "paradise", equality and justice will be established.

One must resist the temptation to assume that the Kingdom of God will be the realization of the working class. This is not so. The kingdom of God is the place of justice and equality where no person will suffer the oppression of another one.

2. The Not-Yet of the Kingdom. The kingdom of God does not end in the midst of one group or in society. This kingdom is also transcendental, transcends history whose

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(16) Gutierrez, A Theology..., p. 167.

(17) Ibid, p. 168-69

bounds are death.

Here comes the critical/utopism function of the Christian faith and hope in the Kingdom. The Kingdom also "transcends" the world (now) in the sense that it is the critical norm to judge any human (present) order, at any stage (pre-revolutionary, revolutionary, post-revolutionary).

The "coming of the Son of Man" is not the inauguration of a New Era in history, but the continuation with a different meaning: The Kingdom is consummated and God will reign over all.

God's followers have to be very conscious of this new reign, and it will be sinful to try to place it in the mystical beyond, so far that it can never be reached in our thinking. Matthew 25 tries to correct this falacy, and Jesus is very clear what the reality shall be when "the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him".

The entering into the consummated Kingdom is determined in certain ways by the vision of the Now-Kingdom and the manner in which persons acted and responded to the cry and the suffering of the poor.

Once more it is shown that in order to enter into the Kingdom, either to the now or to the not-yet, one cannot escape from this world. God sent his Son to this earth to bring liberation and salvation, and it is only here, where one can begin walking toward the portal of that Kingdom, and this is done by doing God's will in his world and following Jesus' teachings.

The tension between these two concepts of the Kingdom has to be maintain, just like the tension between faith and works (James 3:18-26). Ugalde points to the tension in which the Christian lives, when he takes seriously the salvific history:.

The acts of the Christian operate between the now, the situation that receives strength from the Spirit, and the not-yet that keeps us going. On the other hand, the Spirit present in the community, through our faith in the Resurrected One, give us the promise and the assurance that our search for the God that moves history is not absurd, but that we have to wait (better yet "hope"), against all hope and to struggle with all the strength that at the end triumphs.

We act in hope, with pain, in order to give birth to the total humanity, and we act in each moment by caring for the problems that destroy people (lack of housing, inadequate schools, political domination, economic dependency, manipulation of individuals, etc.). The not-yet is a responsibility of humanity, that from the now (the other way around will be pelagianism), should guide us to the encounter with God. (18)

The concept of the Kingdom becomes a reality when this gift is accepted in faith, and when our sisters and brothers are served also in faith, by becoming one of of them. One has to remember: "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Mtt. 25:40).

C. Popular Religiosity and the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) (19)

The Latin American churches are confronting a chal-

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(18) Luis Ugalde, "Ambigüedad de la esperanza de los cristianos. Utopía y transformación", in his Liberación de América Latina (Bogotá: Editorial América Latina, 1971), p. 98.

allenge: How to work, to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to bring the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of justice of the Lord. (LK. 4:18-19)

The challenge is a very serious one, and it calls the Church to stop being the leader of a privatistic religion. In order for the Church to operate effectively and do God's will, she has to be very conscious that it is necessary to choose sides, and like God and Jesus, the only side is that of the poor, which means to break away from the rich and the powerful. "No one can serve two masters." (Mt. 6:24)

The Church cannot serve at the same time a God, who demands justice for the oppressed, and the Lords of capital, who are the oppressors.

To try to reconcile these opposite poles is to ignore the nature and the character of the conflict. On the other hand, the radical option for the poor and exploited, does not entail hating the rich and the powerful.  
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If the Church is going to serve the poor, it must learn from the people how to bring and insert religious experience and values into the life style, needs, culture and institutions of the poor. The Church has to learn that she is the body of Christ that exists to serve the poor and not

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(19) The communities are better known by CEBs which stands for the Portuguese and Spanish, Comunidad Eclesiastica de Base.

(20) Frei Betto, O que e Comunidade Eclesial de Base (Sao Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1981), p. 12.

the other way around.

1. The Church of the Poor. The subject does not imply a new church or sect. It express only that if the church is going to be true to Jesus' teaching, especially in Latin America [but not only there], it has to be open to the majority of the people. The popular religiosity, which is the religious experience of "the poor, the simple ones", and also reaches all the other social sectors is one of the few activities that bring together people of the same faith in the one Lord. This is accomplished in our broken world or communities.

Popular religiosity is only restricted to the Catholic faith. Protestants have been scared to open God and the imported ritualistic way of worship to the people. In this way Protestants are becoming oppressors by denying their rich heritage that is also sacred when it is offered to God.

The church is born of the people, and in Latin America one can say that it is a church that is born and grows with the poor. The people are alienated from their own culture by imposing a foreign format of worship, by singing strange music and castigating their folklore as sinful and not good enough for our God.

It is only in recent years that popular music has been allowed to invade hymnology, but it is not considered acceptable to have this music in most churches, except the Pentacostal churches, among young people and "charimatics".

One needs to be aware of the importance of the "wisdom of the poor" toward God.

It creatively combines the divine and the human, spirit and body, communion and institution, person and community, intelligence and emotion. For the common people this wisdom is also a principle of discernment and an evangelical instinct through which they spontaneously sense when the Gospel is served in the Church and when it is emptied of its content and stifled by other interests. (21)

It is clear that the Church can gather the people in the temples and for other activities outside the local church. It is during these events that the opportunity is presented to preach the good news and reach the poor, but this is only accomplished when they speak, feel and sing in the language, and expression of the poor.

The church of Jesus is a sojourner in Latin America, and the Spirit is calling her to a new conversion. The Spirit calls her to become the Church of the Poor and she has the obligation to announce and bring liberation, and to become a testimony to its faith.

The religiosity of the poor in the life of the church and its mission can be characterized in two ways:

1. The Church with its social doctrine responds to the abuses of human dignity. This is accomplished on two levels.

One is by giving assistance when there is a violation of rights, but in this process there is no interest in questioning the reason for the oppression or the system that

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(21) John Eagleson and Philip Scharper (eds.) Puebla and Beyond (New York:Orbis, 1980), p. 185.

causes the oppression of the poor.

In this model, the Church usually is influenced by certain "universal" principles, and the assistance is given more on the charitable basis stressing the value of the individual and at the most proposing a reform of the capitalistic society.

2. The second model calls for the Church not only to question an oppressive system and its effects, using social analysis but it has to actively participate in the denunciation and in the transformation of the present oppressive system for one more just.

This ministry consists of a combination of several elements: social assistance, actions of solidarity, denunciation and involvement in the political system. This can be expressed through the CEBs since this is one way to achieve changes for a more just society.

Such a ministry is determined and shaped by a faith in God, by practice, and reflection on God's will in order to transform the unjust order. (22)

2. Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs). One aspect of Christianity since Vatican II that has affected all aspects of life in Latin America is the development and rapid expansion of the CEB. The growth of these communities has raised the hopes of the poor and the oppressed for in them

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(22) Irarrazabal, p. 22.

they can become familiarized with their problem and with others with the same problems and oppressions.

The CEB in Latin America were consecrated at Medellín and Puebla as a renewal or "new face for the Latin American Church," and referred to as "an expression of the preferential love of the Church for the simple people." (Puebla 643; 617 - 657) (23).

The CEB are small groups that are established and organized by lay people or priests. These groups operate within the church and their nature is religious and pastoral not only for the members but also for the entire community.

They are Base because they are established by people who work with their hands (the poor). These include: people from the cities and rural farm workers, and people who are united by the same suffering and same oppression, which was a result of the system and of the rich. They are also Base because they are made up of people who seek to break bread together in communities and live within the church where the word of God is read and interpreted from the under-side of history, the side of the poor.

They are Christian, because they gather around the church as the basic nucleus of their faith. They believe in the justice of God for the poor, in the Lord who is Lord of all humanity. They believe that a just God does not desire hunger, cold, sickness, torture, and the alienation of human-

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(23) Eagleson and Scharper, p. 210-214.



ity.

Finally, they are *Comunitates*, because they gather people of the same faith, people that belong to the same local church and live in the same neighborhood. The people have the same communal problems, the same struggles for survival for better conditions of life, and the same faith and hope for salvation and liberation.

After Medellín, in the midst of the desperation and poverty of the people of Latin America, the Church discovered the poor. This was important and gave a new dimension to the mission of the Church, but also the poor discovered that the Church was willing not just to speak for the poor and against the system that oppressed them, but what was more important: to work with the poor, to walk side by side. The poor also discovered that the Church was not only willing to give them the space needed to express their faith, but that this new church of the "aggiornamento" was also ready to give the poor the space and the guidance to organize and to mobilize the voice and the rightful expression of the poor in the midst of their oppression. (24)

It has to be emphasized that BCCs are not biblical groups. They do not meet to read the Bible on an historical basis. In the BBCs the Bible is read on the basis of actual events and in mutual awareness with study or analysis of the social reality, also this analysis is directed beyond the

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(24) Betto, p. 22.

personal or family perspective and into the community. Frei Betto states:

The reflection circles show that the Holy Scriptures are not based only on past history, or that it is a box of divine oracle. It is a history of the people, that is being re-read by the same people under the light of faith of the Lord of liberation. The community takes conscience that in this active participation they are also writing their Bible. (25)

Carlos Mesters, the Carmelite missionary working in Brazil, is one who has been most influential in the Bible circles that work with CEBs (26), and in these circles, "The Bible is very important in the life and growth of grassroots communities" (27)

The dialectic method utilized is based on: see - judge - act. The group might meet in the house of one of the families, and after singing a few religious songs, usually written by them or by members of other CEBs', the facilitator starts asking everyone how their week was at work, at home, and in the *barrio*. Without expanding on them, the problems and the difficulties are noticed. This is not difficult because all are suffering in one way or another the reality of their daily lives. The problems of some are intertwined with the problems of others. No one is allowed to solve their problems isolated from others. They

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(25) Ibid, p. 33.

(26) Ibid, p. 32.

(27) Carlos Mesters, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People", in Torres and Eagleson (eds.) The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities (New York:Orbis, 1982), p. 197.

are a community. (28)

When the people touch on those problems, they are not afraid to present them, to identify the situation and the persons who are involved. It is important that the community see that the problem which affect them have consequences for everyone. This is the "see" part.

The Bible plays an important and decisive role in justice and shows us, historically, on whose side God is and how His word extends beyond the laws that govern our society. It is of outmost importance that the Bible becomes indispensable in each meeting. How will Jesus interpret and act on such a situation? What shall we do? (29) This is the "judge" portion.

It is important that the problems are understood: why they exist, what produces them, and who is to blame for them. This is called "analyzing the problem" or "having critical analysis". Unfortunately, the poor have been used to "swallow the whole thing". (30)

Out of these an action might result. There have been times when CBBs have worked on a problem for weeks or months before an action was taken.

These CBBs are not affiliated with any political

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(28) "Como establecer comunidades cristianas" Solidaridad No. 46, Bogota, Colombia, 1983, p. 33.

(29) Ibid.

(30) Arnaldo Zenteno, "Las comunidades eclesiales de base en la Iglesia popular", CRIE No. 73, San Jerónimo, Mexico, May 26, 1981

party, (31) and they do not receive any form of contributions from any political party. They are ecclesial groups. The CEBs do have a commitment to change the social structure and it is clear that they have made a choice in conscientizing the poor on their problem. This stems from their religious faith in a God of justice and righteousness, that has chosen the side of the poor and oppressed.

As ecclesial groups, they exist on their own terms, with no strings attached to any organization. When they have to decide on some political action, each one of the members can decide for themselves. (32)

For the CEBs the liturgy of their worship is the expression of their community and of themselves. In a poor and simple way they try to express their reverence, love and happiness to God.

In the worship, the popular communities reflect the social interrelation that exists between the members and what needs and social interests they hold in common.

The language takes a new meaning. It is a language that the people understand. The liturgy stops being a monologue given to passive listeners, and it begins to be a dialogue with the word of God, to whom they bring their problems.

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(31) Though they have political relevance and they are courted by politicians and political parties. They may make political options in a particular function or issue.

(32) James Pitt, "Basic Communities of Brazilian Church in Action", LADOC X:29 (1980) 31.

It is the people who set the pace for the "dialogue-sermon".

It is the people who set the pace for the "dialogue-sermon".

The liturgical symbols are extracted from the daily lives of the people, relating in this manner the social function and the religious liturgy that is becoming open to the poor.

It can be said that the dynamic of the CEBs strides on:

1. The centrality of the Gospel. This is an important aspect of the life of the communities. They study the Gospel and reflect on their own lives in its light. (33)

2. The option for the Poor. People working with the communities have chosen to work with the poor: Pastors, priests, leaders, Bishops - they are invited by the poor to join them in building a more just society.

3. Concientization and liberation. This is a logical step in the lives of these communities. Bringing the Gospel to the poor demands both: concientizing of the entire society and working for the liberation of the oppressed.

This is only the result of reading and reflecting on the Gospel and thinking critically about the causes of injustice and oppression and what to do.

4. Mission to the Structures. Since the church exists in the world to transform it, the communities understand the mission work not only around their city or in individualistic terms, but also to the structures that oppose the

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(33) Ibid.

liberation and the righteousness of God.

5. Respect for the "Other". The poor have never received respect from their oppressors. In the CEBs the belief in pluralism is strong. When they study the Bible and relate it to social action, they have a deep sense of respect for everyone. Children are taken seriously; "opponents" are not criticized or put down, and manipulation or force is not likely to be present in their meetings or in the decision to be taken. (34)

To show respect for the "other", especially children, James Pitt wrote a conversation between Geraldo and himself (35):

- J. "Well, what do you do?"
- G. "I work with children from six years old upwards."
- J. "What sort of work?"
- G. "Political education - conscientization."
- J. "With six-years old?"
- G. "Why not? Why do you always assume that children must be the objects of the decisions of others? Why do you expect that children should always have decisions made for them? Why not educate them to be responsible subjects of history, capable of fashioning a better world?"
- J. "Of course, of course! But surely kids of six need lots of guidance."
- G. "Yes, but is it guidance that encourages them to feel responsible? Or is it guidance that demeans them, that puts them down? How can you expect people to

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(34) Ibid.

(35) Ibid., p. 29-30. Conversation took place in a community in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

live responsibly and creatively as adults or teenagers if they are not encouraged in real responsibility when they are younger?"

- J. "Well, I see what you are driving at. But what do you actually do?"
- G. "I belong to an organization called 'Friends of Children' which is connected with the Church. My main work is with children who live by scavenging off a municipal rubbish dump. They recycle tins and bones. I follow the conscientization method of Paulo Freire. By spending time with the children it has been possible to identify the 'creative themes' of their culture. I always start with their preceptions. I have taken photographs which encode the themes. For example, one thing they talk about a lot is home. Here are some photographs of the kinds of homes they live in. (The photos are of very fragile slum dwellings, made out of bits of wood, old doors, corrugated iron, etc.) Here are some photos of rich people's homes. We look at the pictures together and discuss. We make puppet shows together. We are building a new city out of cardboard for the puppets, a city founded on justice. We always reflect and see what we can learn about society. One day I asked the children what rights they should have. The spontaneous response was very similar to the U.N. declaration of the Rights of the Child."
- J. "Well, this sounds very impressive. But have the children actually done anything? Are they displaying the ability to be 'responsible subjects of history' as you so nicely put it?"
- G. "Recently the municipality announced it was going to put a wall around the rubbish dump to keep the children out. The municipality thought it was bad for the image of the town. 'What shall we do?' said the children. They decided to take the wall down if it was put up. This was communicated to the municipality via a social worker. Negotiations started between the children and the municipality. Compromise was reached. There would be a gate in the wall which the children would staff and only

those children who live nearby and who had passes (to be issued by the children) would be allowed in. But this has caused dissension among the children. Who should get the passes? Who should decide this? This is what they are working out now."

J. "Good, but this all seems to depend on you. What happens if you are not there?"

G. "After about five years some of the original children have now become animators. (36) I keep in touch with them and facilitate contact between the groups. But they are really doing the work. There are so many children. There is so much oppression. It is crazy to have no faith in the ideas that children can do anything."

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(36) Animator is a term used in the CEBs to denote the facilitator in a work or discussion. The term "leader" is avoided since it implies authority of someone over the rest of the people.



## CONCLUSION

To deal and speak of Liberation Theology is to speak and deal with the poor; their oppression and their hopes.

Poverty is the result of the injustices created by systems that do not know God, and who are driven by the greed and egotism of money and power. The praxis of justice leads us through a path of love and redemption; this is to follow Jesus' teachings, and to begin to walk towards the kingdom here, now. The same road will take us to the not-yet kingdom.

To be with the poor, to be in solidarity with them is not enough. We have to become poor, we have to be one of them, we have to be brothers and sisters. It is only with and through the poor that we will enter into the kingdom.

The challenge is ours:

Christ has died  
Christ is resurrected  
Christ will come again.

"I am with you always, to the close of the age."  
(Mtt. 28:20)

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